

1992

Sustaining and impinging factors on teaching satisfaction of effective middle level teachers

Cheryl D. Hoversten
University of Northern Iowa

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**Sustaining and impinging factors on teaching satisfaction of
effective middle level teachers**

Hoversten, Cheryl Dea, Ed.D.

University of Northern Iowa, 1992

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EFFECTIVE MIDDLE LEVEL TEACHERS

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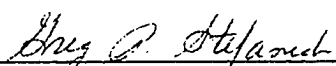
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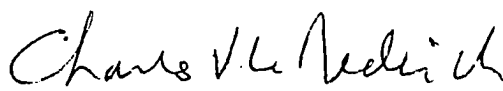
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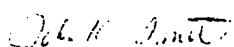
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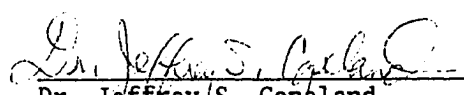
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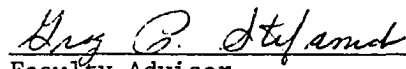
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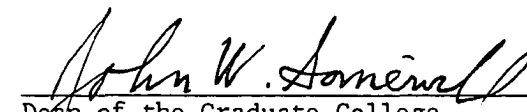
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SUSTAINING AND IMPINGING FACTORS ON
TEACHING SATISFACTION OF
EFFECTIVE MIDDLE LEVEL TEACHERS

An Abstract of a Dissertation
Submitted
In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

Approved:


Faculty Advisor


Dean of the Graduate College

Cheryl D. Hoversten
University of Northern Iowa
July 1992

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to identify the ontogeny of effective middle level teachers. The study was a search through their lives, both professional and private, for those elements that they perceived have contributed to their professional development and consequent attitudes and perspectives on teaching.

A sample of 12 teachers was obtained through reputational-case selection, a process by which teachers were nominated by experts on the basis of their professional expertise. All participants were middle level teachers from two Midwestern states who had at least 10 years of teaching experience.

A career history interview, which focused on critical shifts in perspective that have occurred over time, was conducted, using an open-ended interview guide to direct the interview. This study was a descriptive-narration. Inductive analysis, in which the patterns, themes, and categories of analysis emerge from the data, was utilized in the research synthesis. A qualitative approach was used to gather the data.

Teachers in this study sustained their commitment to teaching through a strong sense of mission, relationship with students, a supportive administrator, and positive feedback from others. Personal characteristics included a desire for change/challenge, positive attitude/high self-esteem, and perception of teaching as a moral enterprise. Crucial factors which shaped the careers of these teachers were mentors or role models, environment, childhood history, family environment, identification with student diversity, and pre-

teaching experiences. Commonalities among the 12 subjects included a mentor/role model, childhood history, family environment, and early recognition of a sense of mission.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Although there are many passages that highlight a person's life, 1985 was a professional turning point for me. It was at that time that I became involved in middle level education at the national level and had opportunities to become acquainted with the leaders in my field. Dr. John Lounsbury, Dr. Conrad Toepfer, Jr., Dr. Greg Stefanich, and Dr. Nancy Doda became my friends and mentors, who encouraged me to pursue a doctorate in education. Dr. Larry Putbrese and Dr. Larry Holt also believed that my voice was needed in a university setting and invited me to share my love of young adolescents with preservice teachers. It was because of these outstanding middle level educators that I accepted the challenge to seek an advanced degree.

I am very grateful to Maureen Busta, my dear friend, who helped sustain me these past two years with her laughter, wit, and unwavering loyalty, and to Phil Hibbard and Don Luck who teased me unmercifully but were always there when I needed advice, technology assistance, or a comforting hug. Paul Smith, Bruce Frana, Ken Nuss, Leonard Upham, Gary Burlough, Robin Spears, Larry Eggig, Sue Sherbet, and Denise Schares showed me the value of collaboration and cooperation and helped me balance work with fun. I shall treasure forever the memories we shared during our educational journey as doctoral students.

My doctoral dissertation committee was composed of five professors whom I deeply respect on both personal and professional levels. Dr.

Greg Stefanich, my advisor, guided me and helped heighten my awareness as a middle level advocate. To have worked as a graduate assistant with such a brilliant and dedicated man was a highlight of my study at the University of Northern Iowa. Dr. Charles Dedrick, Dr. John Smith, Dr. Ned Ratekin, and Dr. Jeff Copeland provided meticulous editing suggestions and positive feedback that enabled me to produce a quality dissertation of which I am proud. For their efforts on my behalf, I am very grateful.

Dr. Margaret Ishler nurtured my professional growth by giving me opportunities to teach classes in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction. Her advice, affirmation, and inviting personality made me feel like a valued member of the staff. Linda Rosulek and Jane Whitehead, my office mates, also made coming to school a joy. Their frequent acts of kindness shall not be forgotten.

My friends in Minnesota did not forget me while I was living in Iowa but supported me through telephone calls, letters, and prayers. Special thanks to Cathy Kurdziel, Heather Ashley, Vernell and Bob Lea, Dianna Herrmann, Muriel Robinson-Nunn, Carol Stevenson, Margo Heaney, Sonia Wood, and Cindy Putbrese for being caretakers of my dreams.

My family has been a constant source of strength for me these past two years. My parents, Stan and Gnythe Clark, the Mayor and First Lady of Remer, Minnesota, sustained me through weekly telephone visits and humorous letters. It was they who encouraged me as a child to "reach for the stars" and become all that I was meant to be. Their unconditional love has given me the confidence to move mountains. My

brother, Jim Clark, and my sister, Kathy Burch, were always there to divide my disappointments or celebrate my joys. For their lifelong support, I am most appreciative.

To my husband Kane Hoversten and my son Shane I owe my deepest gratitude--for they both encouraged me to pursue my dream. Their sacrifice and commitment to my happiness and professional growth enabled me to complete my doctorate and broaden my educational vision. These gifts of the heart shall not be forgotten.

I am indebted to Sherry Nuss, who transcribed my interview tapes and reformatted my paper with an editor's commitment. Her attention to detail was precise and scholarly. Barb Kueter, Joyce Broell, Louise Sandvold, and Joyce Taylor all shared freely their expertise, encouragement, and warm smiles. Beverly Greiner, a former student, reinforced my destiny to teach and reminded me that butterflies still make a difference in the garden of life. For the nourishment she provided my body and soul, I am truly grateful.

Dr. Nancy Doda, who served as auditor for this study, provided valuable assistance in my synthesis and analysis of data. Despite her demanding schedule, Nancy's feedback was prompt and thorough. She is a true professional and friend.

Finally, the 12 outstanding middle level teachers who participated in this study have my deepest respect and admiration. Without their candid perceptions and generosity of spirit, my dissertation would not have been possible.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

To ensure that classrooms are staffed with energetic, motivated teachers, researchers need to identify factors that contribute to job satisfaction. This knowledge will enable educators to provide environments more responsive to teacher needs, which may enable schools to retain effective teachers longer. Retention of capable teachers will improve the quality of education for all students.

Teachers today face greater challenges than ever before. In the wake of declining enrollments in some school districts and economic cutbacks that force educators to do more with less (Austin & Pilat, 1990; Schwab & Iwanicki, 1982), classrooms are overflowing with students who are often hungry, neglected, or making irresponsible choices that involve drugs, alcohol, or sexual experimentation (Duckett, 1988; Wiles & Bondi, 1986). In addition to these challenges in the affective realm, "Teachers are pressured with academic demands for excellence from the public, various government agencies, and special interest groups" (Watts & Shorts, 1990, p. 48).

Areas once outside the teacher's sphere of responsibility such as poverty, family stability, and student wellness are now major factors that influence teacher satisfaction toward student learning (Wiles & Bondi, 1986). To maximize opportunities for students' success, teachers are forced to deal with societal issues so that a readiness for learning can be achieved. Meeting student affective needs challenges a teacher's time and energy, often creating stressful

conditions that cause some teachers to burn out and leave the profession. Other teachers, however, are able to sustain effectiveness despite the complexity of demands that are placed upon them over time.

Job satisfaction seems to correspond with personal attitudes: i.e., accepting and enjoying what one has and what one is (Goodall & Brown, 1980). According to Cano (1990), teachers must learn to perceive job demands not as threats to their well being but as opportunities for growth.

The most critical element of job satisfaction, according to many researchers, is the relationship between teacher and students (Alley, 1980; Blase, 1982; Conley, Bacharach, & Bauer, 1989; Farber, 1982, 1984; Feitler & Tokar, 1985; Fielding & Gall, 1982; Strahan & Van Hoose, 1988). The primary rewards received from working with students--having opportunities to meet instructional and affective needs--are highly valued and correlate with increases in teacher satisfaction, involvement, motivation, and effort (Blase, 1982). Low satisfaction results when teachers perceive themselves to be ineffective with students, when their efforts do not lead to desired outcomes (Blase, 1982; Campbell & Williamson, 1989; Dedrick & Raschke, 1990; Huston, 1989; Leslie, 1989; McLaughlin, Pfeifer, Owens, & Yee, 1986). Teachers tend to reduce their involvement with students when they feel frustrated or unhappy with their work, and this withdrawal is one of the first reactions of those experiencing burnout (Schwab, Jackson, & Schuler, 1986).

Classroom environment also contributes to career satisfaction. A manageable class size, absence of student learning problems, and well-disciplined students all enable teachers to feel more successful in their roles as instructional leaders (Conley et al., 1989).

Teachers who have positive peer relationships perceive their jobs to be more satisfying than those who lack a support system within the school (Cano, 1990; Fielding & Gall, 1982; Kirk & Walter, 1981; Reed, 1979; Schwab et al., 1986; Youngs, 1978). To avoid the sense of isolation and loneliness that many teachers experience (Cecil & Forman, 1990; Dworkin, Haney, Dworkin, & Telschow, 1990; Eisner, 1991; Grady, 1989; Hearn, 1971; Johnson, 1989; McLaughlin et al., 1986; Miller & Johnson, 1981), effective teachers nurture a sense of camaraderie with colleagues, a factor which contributes to a psychological sense of community which is critical to job satisfaction (Austin & Pilat, 1990; Gold, 1987a, 1989; Miller & Johnson, 1981; Needle, Griffin, Svendsen, & Berney, 1980; Schwab & Iwanicki, 1982; Schwab et al., 1986). Creating a positive learning climate also gives teachers an opportunity to personalize the job setting in ways that will improve effectiveness and increase satisfaction (Weinberg, 1990).

A research study conducted by Huston (1989) revealed that job satisfaction increased as teachers perceived a greater sense of personal accomplishment in their work. Alley (1980) found teachers who experience job satisfaction are able to make decisions easily and

rationally, are flexible and able to adapt to change, and feel they are growing professionally through their experiences.

Empowerment, a situation that enables teachers to participate in the decision-making process, is an important factor in job satisfaction (Austin & Pilat, 1990; Capel, 1987; Conley et al., 1989; Dworkin et al., 1990; Grady, 1989; Huston, 1989; Leslie, 1989; Matthews, 1990; Schwab & Iwanicki, 1982; Schwab et al., 1986). Principals who utilize the professional expertise of teachers enable them to feel respected and valued as educators. This positive interaction contributes to a work environment that is pleasant and satisfying (Bertoch, Nielsen, Curley, & Borg, 1989; Campbell & Williamson, 1989; Cano, 1990; Cardinell, 1980; Eskridge & Coker, 1985; Evans & Johnson, 1989; Kyriacou & Sutcliffe, 1978; Leslie, 1989; Youngs, 1978).

According to Weinberg (1990), job satisfaction for teachers is enhanced when they adhere to the following suggestions:

1. Become partners in learning with students.
2. Maintain a positive attitude.
3. Make learning fun.
4. Maintain a sense of humor.
5. Remain flexible in your teaching.
6. Create a positive learning climate.
7. Become a lifelong learner.

These positive behavior choices, according to Weinberg (1990), enable teachers to make classroom life pleasant and productive, which result in job satisfaction.

Teachers who provide academic challenges for students and also try to meet student affective needs often find themselves exhausted from all the demands on their time and energy. Once emotional exhaustion sets in, according to Maslach (1982), people feel they are no longer able to give of themselves to others, and job satisfaction decreases. "It's not that I don't want to help, but that I can't. I seem to have a 'compassion fatigue.' I just can't motivate myself to climb one more mountain" (p. 3). Too many students in a day, with too little time to adequately serve their needs, is a situation, Maslach (1982) warns, that could lead to teacher burnout. This condition can be identified by a shift in the individual's view of other people, a shift from positive and caring to negative and uncaring. Students and other people are perceived in more cynical and derogatory terms, and teachers may begin to lose confidence in their professional capabilities and worth as human beings. This detached perspective Maslach (1982) aptly calls the "cost of caring" (p. 16).

For more than a decade schools have been under scrutiny as widespread concern has been expressed about the quality of public schooling. Declining SAT scores and standardized test scores have raised the level of concern even further (Farber, 1984; Forman, 1982; Pettegrew & Wolf, 1982; Shreeve, Norby, Goetter, Stueckle, Midgley, & Goetter, 1988). Statements made by employers that high school

graduates are not adequately equipped with the basic skills needed for entrance into the job market also have contributed to a growing disillusionment with American education (Eisner, 1991; Schwab & Iwanicki, 1982). These criticisms continually erode the self-confidence of teachers, who may begin to perceive themselves as ineffective and unappreciated.

Occupational stress, which affects job satisfaction, may lead to burnout. This has been a source of national concern as more studies reveal that teachers experience job stress that may threaten the future of the profession and the welfare of children (Cecil & Forman, 1990; Farber, 1984; Fielding & Gall, 1982). Teachers, once happy with their work, become disillusioned and lose their effectiveness when the intrinsic rewards of teaching are surpassed by external factors which diminish career satisfaction (Cano, 1990; Freudenberger, 1974; Gold, 1989; McLaughlin et al., 1986).

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study was to identify the ontogeny of effective middle level teachers. This was a search through their lives, both professional and private, for those elements that they perceived to have contributed to their professional development and consequent attitudes and perspectives on teaching.

Research Questions

1. What are perceptions of effective middle level teachers which sustain their commitment to teaching?

2. What personal and professional events do effective middle level teachers regard as crucial in shaping their careers?

3. In what ways do effective middle level teachers distinguish themselves in reflection on their roles as professional educators?

4. What commonalities exist in professional perceptions and professional roles among the 12 individuals in the sample?

As is almost always the case in qualitative research, the researcher must expect the unexpected and be cognizant of other questions that may emerge during the interview process.

Significance of the Study

To ensure a quality education that can adequately prepare children for the opportunities of the 21st Century, teachers must have energy and enthusiasm as they respond to professional challenges. Whereas teachers who are initially idealistic and committed to the profession are most successful in dealing with the complex demands of today's classroom, these same teachers often become dissatisfied with their jobs and burn out. They leave the profession, taking with them their needed expertise and understanding (Cano, 1990; Reed, 1979).

According to Farber (1984), burnout affects 10-20% of all teachers, and 40% of beginning teachers leave the profession within the first 3 years. It is imperative that a proactive stance, in which efforts are made to increase job satisfaction, be taken in education to ensure that this exit from the teaching ranks of capable and dedicated teachers is minimized (Gold, 1989).

Population and Sample

A sample of 12 teachers was obtained for this study through reputational-case selection, a process by which teachers were nominated by experts on the basis of their professional expertise and positive personal characteristics (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984). All participants were middle level teachers from two Midwestern states who had at least 10 years of teaching experience. This career experience enabled them to reflect on changes which have occurred in their teaching over time.

Maximum variation sampling was a strategy used to increase variation among those selected so that the results reflected diversity within the teaching profession (Patton, 1980). Consideration was given to the following factors in selecting the 12 participants: geographic location of the school, rural vs. urban or suburban setting, gender, and years of teaching experience.

A sample of potential participants for this study was obtained through recommendations from the Boards of Directors of the Minnesota Association of Middle Level Educators and the Iowa Association of Middle Level Educators. Current Board members from the two Associations were asked to recommend teachers whom they perceived to be effective middle level educators. Principals, teachers, counselors, and university professors are elected to these Boards by their state memberships. The school principal was contacted to affirm the effectiveness of those teachers who were recommended. Identified teachers were then invited by letter or telephone to participate in

the study. From those who volunteered, maximum variation sampling was used to determine the final selection of participants: an equal number of men and women, representing both rural and urban/suburban middle schools, with variance in their years of teaching experience.

Instrumentation

A career history interview, which focused on critical shifts in perspective that have occurred over time, was conducted, using an open-ended interview guide to direct the interview. (See Appendix) This guide was broadly based and not inclusive. Questions provided less of a structure for the interview and more of a stimulus for the conversation. The guide enabled the interviewer to explore, probe, and ask questions that illuminated a particular subject (Patton, 1990).

Because qualitative inquiry involves the researcher as the instrument, it is important to note that she taught 21 years in middle level schools and was honored in 1985 as one of six finalists for Minnesota Teacher of the Year, sponsored by the Minnesota Education Association.

Procedure

A pilot study was conducted with two effective middle level teachers before the formal research process began. Reputational-case selection was used and verified by the building principal. Those recommended were contacted and invited to participate in the study. This enabled the interview guide to be field tested to determine where prompts might need to be added and to ascertain the length of time

needed to gather the data. If data revealed interesting patterns or suggested pertinent questions that would improve the interview guide, it was revised to incorporate this information.

After the data analysis was completed, the volunteer had an opportunity to review notes to check for accuracy during a follow-up meeting. Additional feedback was obtained at this time to further clarify points made previously. Upon completion of the debriefing session, a synthesis was made of information gleaned from the interviews. This synthesis provided a basis on which to analyze the data obtained during the formal research study.

All 12 interviews were taped so that validity checks could be made on content after transcription. Researcher notes included non-verbal communication as well as pertinent data.

Selected subjects were notified, and arrangements were made by telephone to conduct interviews that ranged as long as necessary. Classroom observations were made when the researcher deemed it pertinent to the study. A follow-up interview allowed participants an opportunity to validate the data and offer further input or clarification before the study was formally synthesized and completed.

Dr. Nancy Doda, an internationally recognized expert in middle level education, served as auditor by providing feedback on the researcher's synthesis and interpretation of data. The researcher and the auditor conducted an independent analysis on the first question, and the analyses were exchanged by mail. This was followed by consensus agreement through a telephone conference. On subsequent

questions, the auditor reviewed the analysis of the researcher, shared reactions, and offered suggestions. Reactions were exchanged in writing and through telephone conferencing.

Organization of the Study

This study was a descriptive-narration, with data obtained through career history interviews. Inductive analysis, in which the patterns, themes, and categories of analysis emerge from the data, was utilized in the research synthesis. A qualitative approach was used to gather data by asking questions which reflected any of the following categories as recommended by Patton (1980, pp. 207-208).

1. Experience/behavior questions
2. Opinion/value questions
3. Feelings questions
4. Knowledge questions
5. Sensory questions
6. Background/demographic questions

Assumptions

It was assumed that the teachers in the sample were representative of effective middle level teachers as a group. The researcher also assumed that those nominating potential research subjects recommended participants who truly were effective teachers with professional credibility. Another assumption was that the participants' perceptions of their experiences were accurate. By utilizing triangulation through the pilot study, interview data, and auditor feedback, the research results had consistency.

Limitations

Because only teachers from two Midwestern states were participants, there was the possibility that conditions of regional practice might have affected the outcome of this study. Whereas all of the interviews were conducted in the winter, during the mid-point of a school year, the time of year in which the study was conducted might also have had an influence on teachers' attitudes.

Definition of Terms

Burnout--A condition that results from stress, tension, and anxiety, caused by the many problems that plague teachers (McGuire, 1979).

Career history interview--An interview that focuses on critical shifts in perspective that occur over time (Dr. A. Sparkes, April, 1990, in private conversation with Dr. J. Smith).

Diversity--Factors such as the geographic location of the school, rural vs. urban or suburban setting, gender, and years of teaching experience that will be considered when participants in the study are selected.

Interview guide approach--A guide that provides structure during an interview which includes predetermined topics that are developed through open-ended questions (Patton, 1990).

Maximum variation sampling--A strategy used to increase variation among those selected so that the results may reflect diversity within the teaching profession (Patton, 1980).

Middle level school--A school "which embraces 5-8, 6-8, 7-8, 7-9, and other grades in the middle" (Alexander & McEwin, 1988, p. 1).

Quality--Applying a set of standards to determine the effectiveness or value of a program, process, objective, or curriculum (Worthen & Sanders, 1987).

Reputational-case selection--A method of selecting subjects for a research study based on the recommendation of experienced experts in an area. Principals may be asked to recommend their most competent teachers (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984).

Transescent--"Pupil usually found in grades 6, 7, & 8 who is in the transitional phase of life between childhood and adolescence" (Eichhorn, 1984, p. 31).

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

With the publication of the Carnegie report, "A Nation at Risk" (Gardner, 1983), there has been an increased national focus on the quality of public education in American schools. Research literature abounds with articles that advocate ways to improve school effectiveness and increase learning opportunities for students. The level of concern is raised as effective teachers who facilitate student learning become dissatisfied with their career choice and leave the profession. At the current rate of exodus, a teacher shortage seems likely to occur in the 1990s, which will directly impact the educational future for countless students (Gardner, 1983).

To better understand factors that influence teacher performance and provide a framework for this study, the literature review will include societal conditions that impinge upon teacher effectiveness and intrinsic/extrinsic factors that affect job satisfaction.

Societal Conditions

Society has changed rapidly since the first middle school was established in the 1960s. Due to financial restrictions and state regulations, small neighborhood schools have consolidated in many areas. Single parent homes are becoming more the norm as divorce rates continue to soar, and peer pressure on adolescents to indulge in drugs, alcohol, sexual activity, or other self-destructive behaviors takes a daily toll (Wiles & Bondi, 1986). The middle level students

who enter classrooms today bear slight resemblance to the carefree, clean-cut kids portrayed in the "Leave it to Beaver" television show of the 1960s. In contrast, statistics compiled in 1986 by Wiles and Bondi show clearly why classrooms are filled with youngsters who live lives of quiet desperation, and why teaching has become such a stressful, frustrating profession:

1. Teenage suicide, which occurs every ninety minutes, is now the second leading cause of death among teenagers. Only accidents claim more lives.

2. Twenty percent of American students live in poverty.

3. Teenage alcoholism has increased 800% in the last decade. One in 10 students, based on estimations, will become alcoholic by the age of 18.

4. Eleven million teenage girls became pregnant in 1985. The increased pregnancies of girls under the age of 15 have begun to surpass those of late teens.

5. Fifteen thousand murders, committed by teenage boys, occurred in 1985. The peak age for committing a crime of violence was 14.

6. Only 16% of American homes have a traditional family unit, where the father works and the mother remains at home. Latch-key children, who may spend 3 to 4 hours at home alone, now comprise 30% of the students.

7. In the last decade, the average age of beginning smokers dropped from 14 to 10.

8. Fifteen percent of children today are born out of wedlock. By the time they are in the middle grades, half of them will have spent time in a single-parent home.

9. Serious health problems exist for about 20% of youth between the ages of 7-11. Many children do not receive the health care they need.

10. One in four American families moves each year.

11. One in four students who leave school in the eighth grade fails to graduate. For many young adolescents, their last formal schooling occurs during the middle level grades.

The external pressures on young adolescents are great, as television, movies, and music glamorize high-risk activities and irresponsible life choices. It is understandable why some youth are confused by the double messages received from institutions, media, and in some instances, parents who expect transescents to assume responsibilities beyond their years because of financial need, such as caring for young children for many hours a day or preparing meals for the family on a regular basis. Other parents may expect too little from their young adolescents, which may hinder their ability to become responsible decision makers. Some parents push their children into early dating or other activities that many youngsters are not equipped to handle, causing emotional maladjustment or insecurity that is carried over into the classroom (Thornburg, 1977; Van Hoose & Strahan, 1988).

Societal and personal pressures may be contributing factors to youth suicide. The rate of adolescent suicides has increased approximately 300% in the past 2 decades (Hunter, 1988).

Although many adults believe drugs and alcohol to be major causes of youth suicide, that analysis may be too simplistic. Young adolescents, unhappy and lost, may become substance abusers in an effort to escape painful life situations or to momentarily ease the void of loneliness as family and peer relationships become fragmented (Toepfer, 1986).

National Documents

With the publication of "A Nation at Risk" (Gardner, 1983), much of the public sector became alarmed over declining test scores in math and reading. The call for accountability in education trumpeted throughout school districts as agendas for "excellence" were developed by school boards or curriculum coordinators. Although concern was shown for an increase in cognitive development and achievement, little consideration was given to equally critical needs in the affective domain. Concern for balance in meeting the developmental needs of students was non-existent (Toepfer, 1986).

Heightened awareness of the need for developmentally-appropriate curriculum and teacher instruction led to the drafting of an important national monograph: An Agenda for Excellence at the Middle Level (Arth, Johnston, Lounsbury, & Toepfer, 1985). Twelve major areas were addressed to improve the quality of instruction for young adolescents that would facilitate growth in both cognitive and affective domains.

The authors who drafted the document made the following recommendations to enhance learning for middle level students:

1. Use a variety of instructional practices.
2. Organize instruction so that it conforms to the varying attention spans of young adolescents.
3. Plan instruction that accommodates individual student learning styles.
4. Provide for maximum time on task.
5. Foster cooperative learning activities rather than individual competitive tasks.
6. Maintain an orderly, well-structured atmosphere for learning.
7. Use group interaction to stimulate creative problem solving and productive thinking.
8. Plan for the management of learning tasks and activities, not just content coverage.
9. Provide regular feedback on student work, both written and oral.
10. Extend contact between teachers and students.
11. Adapt material for use in the classroom, and do not rely on the textbook as the organizer for the course of instruction.
12. Capitalize on students' natural activity levels through physical activity and hands-on instruction (Arth et al., pp. 8-10).

By improving effectiveness in the classroom through sound instructional strategies, teachers should also experience greater job satisfaction. In a study by Farber (1982) on teacher stress and

burnout, he found that the most satisfying experiences for teachers were those that "enabled them to feel competent, important, and committed to the profession while interacting with students" (p. 5). According to Jackson, Schwab, and Schuler (1986), "Educational leaders need to nurture rather than stifle the growth of teachers so that they feel challenged, motivated, and capable of excellent performance" (p. 637).

Qualities of Effective Teachers

What makes a teacher effective? Laminack and Long (1985) surveyed preservice teachers enrolled in education programs, asking them to recall their best elementary school teachers. Descriptors of effective teachers were given for each of the following categories: classroom management, personality, teaching strategies/techniques, and appearance.

Respondents indicated that their best teachers were firm yet fair in classroom management procedures, organized but flexible when dealing with student diversity. Instructors were remembered as loving, caring individuals with positive attitudes towards learning. The enthusiasm characteristic of their personalities was noted as genuine, and this excitement for learning was transferred to the students.

Effective teachers designated in this study were young, attractive, and well-dressed. They possessed a good sense of humor and used laughter to build a positive classroom climate. Perhaps because the teachers recalled were young and just beginning their

careers, they were willing to experiment more with new ideas and a variety of instructional strategies. Concrete learning activities and individualized instruction were utilized to facilitate student success.

The overwhelming majority of responses in this research study focused upon the affective qualities of teachers.

From a student's perspective, attention to an individual's affective development enhances cognitive development, and perhaps establishes an atmosphere conducive to maximum learning. (Laminack & Long, 1985, p. 269)

This readiness to learn is established through a teacher/student relationship based on mutual trust and respect.

Laminack and Long (1985) concluded from their study that neither subject matter competence nor sensitivity to affective development is sufficient in itself for excellent teaching; rather, teachers must strive to establish a balance so that student growth can occur in both cognitive and affective domains.

Research conducted by Strahan and Van Hoose (1988) supported teaching to the total child, as advocated in the previous study. These authors analyzed ways that successful middle level teachers anticipate the developmental needs of young adolescents in both cognitive and affective domains and meet these needs in their classrooms. Through Invitational Education, as first described by Purkey (Strahan & Van Hoose, 1988), teachers foster positive perceptions and influence active learning through messages they send to students.

Two critical qualities of successful middle level teachers are understanding students' cognitive and affective needs and perceiving students as capable learners (Strahan & Van Hoose, 1988). Instructors who are sensitive to the unique complexities of early adolescence can reduce the stress that occurs in the student/teacher relationship through developmentally-appropriate instruction, which will create the positive climate needed for learning to occur.

Invitational Education seeks to make learning inviting for students, according to Strahan and Van Hoose (1988). The focus is upon establishing an environment that will nurture self-esteem. By utilizing instructional strategies that accommodate a diversity of learning styles, teachers can help young adolescents see themselves as capable learners. This awareness will enable students to assume more responsibility for their own learning, which will increase opportunities for success.

Students will only begin to perform more successfully when they begin to feel more successful. Even the most exciting lessons or enjoyable activities will have little impact unless students perceive that they are valuable, able, and responsible. (p. 4)

Strahan and Van Hoose (1988) believed that cognizance of the developmental needs of early adolescence was critical to effective teaching. Teachers who plan lessons to accommodate student diversity in social/emotional, physical, and intellectual areas will facilitate student success, which is a primary reward for teachers. When students become more capable learners, job satisfaction is increased.

Factors of Job Satisfaction

Factors of job satisfaction, according to Shreeve et al. (1988) "shift with the times and fluctuate with the mores, in effect, reflecting facets of the changing culture" (p. 182). Despite the fact that they may change under different circumstances, five critical factors were identified which contribute to job satisfaction:

1. Teacher Professionalism

Teachers want to be treated as professionals and become discouraged when administrators, parents, or factions of society do not acknowledge the importance of their contributions. Teachers are typically motivated by a desire to serve students in ways that will enhance learning. When they feel that their service is unappreciated, morale declines, and this in turn contributes to teacher dissatisfaction.

2. Teacher Career Expectations

The fulfillment of expectations can determine job satisfaction, whereas unmet expectations can lead to stress and burnout. When teachers are able to reach career goals, they are happier and more motivated to invest time and energy in their teaching.

3. Teacher Decision Making

A number of researchers have noted correlations between staff decision making and job satisfaction (Austin & Pilat, 1990; Capel, 1987; Conley et al., 1989; Dworkin et al., 1990; Grady, 1989; Huston, 1989; Leslie, 1989; Matthews, 1990; Schwab & Iwanicki, 1982; Schwab et al., 1986). Principals who empower teachers by seeking input before

important educational decisions are made enable teachers to feel valued and respected for their expertise. This, in turn, causes teachers to perceive their schools as more effective than those with low job satisfaction (Schulz & Teddlie, 1987; Shreeve et al., 1988).

4. Teacher-Principal Collaboration

When principals show respect for teachers and allow them access to important information, a professional partnership develops, which enables teachers to feel a sense of security and independence (Schulz & Teddlie, 1987; Shreeve et al., 1988).

5. Teacher Motivation and Growth

Motivators that deal with intrinsic values, such as achievement, recognition, and responsibility must be provided so that teachers can grow towards self-actualization (Shreeve et al., 1988). By providing opportunities for teachers to attain both intrinsic and extrinsic reinforcement, "They will realize their aspirations as professional educators, which will enable them to bring forth the highest possible achievement from their students" (Shreeve et al., 1988, p. 193).

Herzberg, Mausner, and Snyderman (1959) labeled factors that contribute to job satisfaction as either satisfiers or dissatisfiers. Intrinsic values which enable teachers to find satisfaction in their work are called satisfiers. A few examples include recognition, achievement, and responsibility. Dissatisfiers are related to extrinsic matters derived from conditions of work. Factors that relate to interpersonal relations, salary and working conditions,

administrative practices, or personal life have low motivational potential but can, if not provided for, lead to decreased performance.

McLaughlin et al. (1986) believed that the structure of American schools guarantees that teachers will fail. While there are opportunities for teachers to achieve intrinsic rewards from helping students learn, many teachers simultaneously internalize feelings of deep personal failure when they are unable to help struggling students because of large class sizes, demands on time and energy, or lack of support personnel. Perceiving themselves as unable to make a difference in their students' lives cause many teachers to question their competence and mission to positively impact children's learning. This disenchantment often leads to strong feelings of failure in even the most dedicated teachers; over time, they may burn out and leave the profession.

Teacher Burnout

Teacher burnout is a critical issue in education today. More teachers are leaving the ranks than ever before as stressful conditions diminish job satisfaction, causing once-committed teachers to abandon the profession. Other people, cognizant of the complex demands made on teachers' time and energy, seriously reconsider the high cost of a teaching career and choose other areas perceived as less demanding and more rewarding. As a result of these losses in talent and potential, combined with additional losses that occur when teachers choose early retirement or retire, teacher shortages may continue to be an area of concern in education.

The Carnegie report, "A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century" (Carnegie Forum, 1986) estimated that, in order to deter a possible teacher shortage which may occur in the 1990s, 23% of each graduating class must enter the teaching ranks. This appears highly unlikely, because the recent increase of approximately half of 1% added to the current 6% who receive teaching degrees each year will be "staggeringly insufficient" (Shreeve et al., 1988, p. 182). To counteract a serious teacher shortage, society must take steps to make a teaching career more satisfying. This will enable schools to retain effective teachers currently employed and will aid in attracting more new teachers to the profession (Huston, 1989).

The neediness of students in both academic and affective realms was found to be the major source of teacher job dissatisfaction by McLaughlin et al. (1986), and Conley et al. (1989). These researchers believed that, unless changes were made in the organizational structure of schools to counteract the feelings of helplessness and frustration that many teachers experience, the future of the profession looks bleak.

If schools recruit talented people but fail to provide a work environment in which they can become successful, teachers will surely become disillusioned with their careers, no matter how well qualified they are. (Conley et al., 1989, p. 59)

There is a close relationship between burnout and turnover which can be seen early in a professional career. Two years is cited most frequently as the first critical point at which burnout may compel teachers to quit and leave the profession (Maslach, 1982). Many of

these young teachers, disillusioned with their career choice, join the ranks of business and industry (Huston, 1989).

What is burnout? According to Webster's dictionary (1988), burnout is defined as exhaustion caused by emotional or physical stress. Freudenberger (1974) coined the term burnout to explain "the state of physical and emotional depletion resulting from conditions of work" (p. 160). McGuire (1979) perceived burnout as a condition that results from stress, tension, and anxiety caused by the many problems that plague teachers. "Burnout is usually considered the final step in a progression of unsuccessful attempts to cope with a variety of negative stress conditions" (p. 66).

Burnout among teachers can occur in at least three different ways, according to research by Cano (1990) and Maslach (1982): emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment burnout. Conditions of exhaustion and depersonalization were also cited in the literature by Friesen, Prokop, and Sarros, 1988; Gold, 1987a, 1989; Grady, 1989; Jackson et al., 1986; Johnson, 1989; Kyriacou and Sutcliffe, 1978.

Stress Management

Cano (1990) suggested the following strategies for coping with stress and burnout:

1. Identify the problems that cause frustration and develop strategies to deal with them.
2. Develop a positive network among peers.

3. Avoid monotonous classroom routines by adding variety to lessons and activities.

4. Make personal wellness a priority.

5. Become a lifelong learner.

6. Maintain a reasonable work schedule.

It is critical, according to Eskridge and Coker (1985), for both preservice teachers and those already employed to develop awareness of the symptoms of stress, to learn how to identify the causes, and to develop strategies for stress management.

Gold (1987b) believed that induction programs could be more effective in preparing preservice teachers for the realities of the classroom. She advocated four key factors that should be addressed when dealing with stress management and reduction:

1. The need for teachers to become aware of their own stress and its effect on them

2. Identification of perceived levels of burnout in the areas of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment

3. The development of an individual stress reduction plan to deal with stress and prevent burnout

4. Establishment of support systems, both individual and group, to prevent loneliness and isolation and to provide necessary intervention strategies.

Induction programs, according to Gold (1989), must enable beginning teachers to make the transition from a university where supervising teachers provide professional support and encouragement to

a classroom setting, where teachers often feel alienated and unsupported. "Stress in the life of a beginning teacher must be identified and reduced if burnout of young, gifted teachers is to be eliminated" (p. 69).

Eisner (1991) echoed the sentiment that teaching is a lonely profession. Teachers, he perceived, seldom have opportunities to team teach with colleagues or receive input on matters of instructional techniques during classroom observations. For many idealists, teaching becomes frustrating and unrewarding, causing a re-examination of commitment.

In a research study conducted by Watts and Short (1990), 500 Texas elementary and secondary teachers were randomly selected and asked to denote measures of job satisfaction. Sixty-seven percent of the respondents admitted that they were giving serious thought to leaving the profession. Some who expressed disillusionment with teaching said that, although quitting was not an option in their lives for financial reasons, they were waiting for retirement. According to Conley et al. (1989), teacher recruitment and compensation are not the only issues that must be addressed by educators and concerned citizens. Factors that prevent teachers from achieving a sense of efficacy and professional accomplishment must be dealt with so that teachers can find greater career satisfaction. Unless the current reform efforts give serious consideration to the work environment, the exit of effective teachers from the profession will continue--and the loss in human potential will be devastating.

CHAPTER III

INTERVIEWS

Introduction

Twenty-five effective middle level teachers were identified for participation in this research through reputational-case selection. The 12 chosen reflected diversity which exists within the teaching profession. Nine teachers were Caucasian; African American, Asian American, and Hispanic American teachers presented the three remaining viewpoints. Five of them taught in suburban schools, three taught in urban schools, and four taught in rural settings. A gender balance was attained through selection of six males/six females, equally representing two Midwestern states.

Because the research related to effective middle level teachers, only those who were currently teaching in grades 5-9 were considered as potential subjects. Seven taught in middle schools, two in junior high schools, one in an intermediate school, and two were housed in a high school setting as eighth and ninth grade teachers.

Seven of the 12 teachers had been publicly recognized for their expertise: one was honored as National Teacher of the Year; two were District Teachers of the Year, and one was a nominee; one was referenced in Who's Who in American Education; and another received the Gold Star Teacher Award. One was a nominee for Outstanding Educator of the Year, sponsored by the Jaycees.

The age and years of teaching experience were variables that were addressed in the final selection of subjects. The ages ranged from

33-56; teaching experience was noted from 10-33 years. The majority of teachers had higher education degrees, which included one with a Doctorate of Education and seven with a Master's Degree. The four who had a Bachelor of Science Degree also had additional credits, and two were enrolled in a Master's program.

All 12 of the subjects were married; only one had been divorced. The length of marriages ranged from 3-33 years. One male was separated at the time of the interview but was working towards a reconciliation with his wife. Ten of the participants in the study had children.

Content areas were considered to maximize professional diversity even further: language arts, social studies, math, science, reading, health, physical education, and Spanish were specialties of the teachers in this study. By accounting for as much diversity as possible in the final selection of subjects, the researcher was confident that emerging patterns in the data were credible.

In the following interviews, names of teachers, schools, and communities were changed to ensure confidentiality. Through career history interviews, the researcher discovered how these effective middle level teachers remain committed to teaching.

Troy Johnson

Troy Johnson is an African American who teaches seventh grade science and math in an urban intermediate school in the Midwest. Kellogg Intermediate School, I was told, has one of the largest minority populations of all four intermediate or middle level schools

in the area. There is a high percentage of Black students, but Asians, Mexican Americans, and other students of color also attend. At first glance the student population of 700 may appear to be predominantly Black, but in actuality Caucasians represent 57% of the enrollment. Despite the large student diversity, however, all teachers except three are White.

Although he has worked in the district for 11 years, this is Troy's first year at Kellogg Intermediate School. He previously taught in third, fifth, and sixth grade; the last two years were spent at the high school, working as an administrative assistant. This training program was created to groom teachers for leadership positions within the district. Troy did not receive additional compensation for his work, but he gained valuable experience at the administrative level. His job responsibilities were identical to those performed by the assistant principal except for evaluation of teachers. Troy was assigned to Kellogg before his training program was completed because he was needed as a classroom teacher.

The school building is old, located off a main highway in the community of 60,000 people. It has three levels. A gymnasium, an auditorium, and a swimming pool are three large areas that can be found on different levels. Because the cafeteria is one of the largest in the district, cooks prepare food and package it so that it can be transported to other schools for hot lunch programs.

The students who attend Kellogg Intermediate School are basically from low and lower-middle socioeconomic backgrounds. The strong

mobility of those who drop in and drop out at any time during the school year makes teaching a constant challenge. Because the class sizes vary on a regular basis, Troy discovered there were never enough supplies, textbooks, or teacher resources to accommodate student needs.

We met in his classroom for both interviews. Colorful bulletin boards caught my eye: "Back History is World History," "Celebrate Our Diversity," "You Are a Success," "Don't Let Fractions Crack You Up." A Black male figure is the focal point of one display. The clothing is vibrant and stylish, the haircut eye-catching and modish with shaved layers and patterns. The classroom climate is invitational and reflects the teacher who takes his role as an educator very seriously.

Troy Johnson, 33, grew up in the Watts section of Los Angeles, California, where violence, drugs, and gangs led his three brothers and four sisters to carry guns for protection. He realized at a young age that the only way to improve the quality of life was to leave the environment which he felt was a threat to his very survival.

From seventh grade to my senior year I had three guns pulled on me and two were . . . one was to the head and the other one was within range, and the other one was from a distance. Was shot at once or twice while playing basketball, but . . . you know, out on the playground area. There's sometimes when some days where you get by with nobody get hurt, so you just continue on, you know. That's . . . again, we were just kids growing up. That's the terrible . . . that's enough in itself to make you wanna change, to get out.

During his senior year in high school, a recruiter from the Midwest made a presentation to students who were college bound, offering scholarships, grants, and work-study programs to entice

interest. Troy knew he wanted to be a teacher and planned to leave the area, so he was receptive to the recruiter's message. It was then that the decision was made to attend college in the Midwest.

Troy's parents and grandfather were supportive of his educational goals, and all served as role models throughout his life. His mother attended one year of college and had hoped at one time to become a home economics teacher. She dropped out of school with the birth of her first child. Troy's father never attended college but did receive post-high school training, which was mandatory for his position as supervisor of a maintenance department for a large company. Although his three brothers started college in Los Angeles, all quit within a short time. Troy was the only one of eight children to earn a college degree; and he believes this dream became a reality because he had the courage to leave his environment before negative influences could distort his perspective and sabotage his mission.

Well, at an early age I realized that . . . you know, education was important, and it's a means of doing better, and in my case, of getting out. And I've always realized that, and I decided no matter what happens to me in my life in the course of getting an education, that could never be taken away from me.

Troy left Watts after graduation from high school, returning only yearly to visit family and friends. His parents and one sister came to the Midwest to attend his wedding 8 years ago, but that was the only occasion that family members visited him in his new environment. Troy's last visit home was for his mother's funeral 2 years ago.

My sisters are still there. My brothers are still there. To me, it's . . . it's too dangerous. It's too life threatening. I grew up in the situation, but now I'm in a situation where I don't have

to go there. I don't have to be there. That's the option that I'm not ever gonna take.

The harsh environment that Troy left behind took its toll on his three brothers: the oldest joined a religious cult, while the other two became drug users and dealers. One, convicted for selling crack cocaine, was sentenced to 8 years in prison and only recently completed his sentence. Troy's sisters talk of "getting out" of Watts, but he perceives this as unlikely at this point in their lives. He alone has broken the cycle of violence, poverty, and despair.

Troy and his wife, an elementary teacher in the district, have two daughters who attend elementary school. He happily reported that his children are good students and like to learn. Although he is presently separated from his wife, he sees his family often; a reconciliation appears likely in the near future.

Troy draws on his personal background to relate to students at risk of failure or dropping out of school. By sharing his own struggles, he has attempted to become a role model for many students, who are also fighting their own private battles. Troy says his message is simple: If he is able to accomplish his goals and dreams, so can they, through hard work and determination. Always, Troy emphasizes, education is the key, and his commitment to continue his own education was reinforced through enrollment in a Master's program. His strong sense of mission and commitment to young people are driving forces behind his professional accomplishments.

For years I was the only Black elementary teacher in the district, so I feel kinda special in that I'm giving something to the community. I'm giving somethin' to the kids; I'm giving them the

experience that . . . it's going to give them a . . . a real look, or a different look, of the expectations.

Troy considers himself a survivor; he realizes that he beat the odds. Although he left behind a negative environment to seek personal and professional goals, he was unable to escape the subtle discrimination and prejudice that awaited him in the Midwest, where he was, for many students, the only Black teacher they had ever known.

It's typical of how kids . . . Black kids, White kids, doesn't matter . . . how they view Black males in particular. And I talk to my kids now about it . . . and we may talk about it, how they feel about me at the beginning of the school year. And they were nervous, afraid, didn't know what to expect. Different expectations and that kinda thing, until they get to know me. Then they're put in the position to say, "That's not true."

Although teaching in a school with a great deal of diversity affords opportunities to interact with parents of varied racial backgrounds, Troy realizes that he approaches life from a different reference point and attitude.

There're times when I feel like I'm a total stranger in this community. I found that there's a different mentality. There's a lotta talent here but one of the things I found out . . . there's a complacency level.

One thing I keep stressing to these kids . . . "You can, you know, you can wear a tie and suit and . . . still have fun." I tell them, "You can still be smart." We have a lotta guys who are "cool" and dress well and all the girls like, but they're not very smart. And they do not want to get any . . . smart. "And it's ok to be smart, have a part in your hair and have a square haircut, and . . . and still be 'cool' and smart at the same time." Just this past week I had three kids who wore a tie. One kid wore his two days, and it was just somethin' that they . . . that they did.

Troy uses his own life as a platform on which to present lessons that will enable students to overcome the limitations that have been internalized over time. He also makes frequent references to Black

people and other individuals of color who have made important contributions to society--the "unsung heroes" who are not mentioned in the textbooks. "They're [students] listening and they're saying, 'Man, that's straight, that's fascinating. I didn't know that, you know. I want more. I want to learn more.'"

By nurturing a sense of racial pride in his students, Troy hopes to enhance self-esteem so that they do not drop out of school and limit their chances for success. He believes that his efforts today will make a difference in the quality of life his students will experience tomorrow.

I think teaching is always a mission. It will continue to be a mission because every day, every week, every month, every year, it's totally different. There's a new crop to be harvested every single year, and they keep spurtin' up. And how we take care of 'em is depending on how well they would do afterwards. Whether or not we have a . . . a good harvest.

Troy Johnson--teacher, role model, advocate for personal growth--has come a long way since he left his home in Watts 15 years ago. Although his background was harsh and limiting, the experiences he gained while growing up have enhanced his effectiveness and credibility with students, particularly those who are often the most difficult to reach. It is cognizance of the power of his perspective that enables Troy Johnson to remain committed to teaching.

Brian Erickson

Brian Erickson, 43, has a unique educational background. He was born and raised in a rural area in the southern part of a Midwestern state, graduating from high school in 1966. After completion of college in 1976, he accepted a teaching position at the same middle

school he had attended as a young adolescent. Many of his former teachers and administrators in the district were now his colleagues. The principal who hired him was a former schoolmate and acquaintance, who married one of Brian's classmates and friends. Both men married their high school sweethearts and chose to raise families and establish professional careers in their hometown. This common history has been the foundation of a successful working relationship and friendship that has existed between Brian and his principal during the 14 years that he has taught social studies at Hillcrest Middle School.

For nearly 20 years Hillcrest had been a middle school, one of the oldest and largest in the state, servicing over 900 students in grades 6-8. Because the school could no longer accommodate the growing population, it became a junior high 2 years ago, housing 650 students in grades 7 and 8. One third of the staff were reassigned to elementary schools within the district, a transfer that was very unsettling to many teachers who did not want to leave the middle school setting.

Brian was ready for a change and saw this reorganization as the perfect time to make a move. When a high school social studies position became available, he requested a transfer, which was accepted by the principal with regret. Last year Brian joined the high school faculty, working under an administrator who had been his principal when he was a high school student there over 20 years ago.

Although Brian assumed his tenure at the high school would be permanent, his stay there was short-lived. One year later cutbacks in

the department eliminated his position, and he returned to the junior high. Unhappy with the process, Brian was grateful he had been able to accept, at least temporarily, a new challenge. His success as a high school teacher was evident when he was named in a student poll as one of the three best teachers in the school, an unexpected affirmation that Brian will never forget.

Hillcrest is a rural school; 95% of the students are bussed in from small surrounding villages. Because of the isolation and lack of cultural opportunities, the school is the focal point of entertainment and social activity for many students and community members. Band concerts, athletic events, art shows, spelling bees, and school plays are a few activities that draw people together.

Most of the parents come from low to lower-middle socioeconomic backgrounds. Some families reside in local trailer courts or apartment buildings; a large number of students live with one parent or guardian. The ethnic background is predominantly White--the rare Asian or Black middle school student has been adopted by White parents, so racial diversity is, for all practical purposes, non-existent. The teaching staff and administration also reflect the Caucasian majority.

Brian's professional aspirations were different from those of other members of his family. He was the only one of eight children to attend college. Because his parents were lower-middle class, higher education was never discussed as an option while he was growing up. Brian's father, who owned a bar, and his mother, who remained at home

to raise the family, were too poor to finance additional schooling, so seven of the children became blue-collar workers. None of them, to Brian's recollection, ever verbalized an interest in professional careers.

Because he married at 18 and began his family at 19, Brian realized his only hope for attending college was through the GI Bill. While enlisted in the Air Force, he was able to accrue financial assistance which enabled him to pursue the education he needed to fulfill his dream of becoming a teacher. Although Brian believed that his parents were proud of his career choice, little was ever said to him directly. He recalled his mother's concern about how he could afford to attend college while raising a family. Brian reflected, "If you want something bad enough, you can afford it." His desire to teach was a part of him for as long as he could remember. "I don't recall ever making a decision 'I'm going to be a teacher.' I think it was just there."

Brian's mother and several of his siblings, all with their own families, still remain in the area, close to the old homestead. Brian recalled the special joy it was for him to teach some of his nieces and nephews during their sojourn at the middle school. His brothers and sisters, active members in church and civic affairs, readily acknowledge Brian's expertise as a teacher and refer to him with pride and respect. Brian often receives positive feedback from administrators, neighbors, and community members who have known his family for years. Teaching in his hometown has given Brian longevity

within the community and familiarity with the history of the school district. This enables him to establish credibility with participants across the entire educational spectrum.

Brian uses humor frequently to motivate students and make learning fun, an approach to teaching that had been successfully modeled by his two advisors in college. While student teaching, Brian worked with two supervising teachers who also found ways to weave humor into their lessons. Observing the enthusiastic climate for learning that these educators were able to create in their classrooms inspired Brian to incorporate humor into his own teaching style. This use of humor is, he believes, one of the factors that contributes to his effectiveness as a middle level teacher.

I think all teachers use some humor, but whether they consciously or unconsciously incorporate it into their teaching, that's another question. Some people . . . teachers . . . use humor because they're funny. They like to tell jokes. So you can start a class by telling a joke. That's not the kind of humor I'm talking about. I'm trying . . . the humor that . . . that's incorporated in talking about a lesson. For instance, you're talking about a Civil War episode. There's no reason you can't incorporate some humor or some trivia that's funny, that kids will smile at, because it just makes them understand a little better. It brings out some human qualities in a . . . in a tough . . . otherwise dry presentation. So that's how . . . I'm not good at telling jokes. I'm not . . . I never stand up and tell jokes, because they . . . they wouldn't laugh. But I just try to make things humorous, if I can, to make learning easy.

Brian brings to his teaching a knowledge of community history, which allows him to establish close relationships with students and parents, particularly those who are also long-time residents. Because he can identify with many of their goals and dreams, he is frequently sought out for advice on both personal and professional issues.

Kids do share problems. They really need a lot of advice. I like that. I don't mind that at all. I'm interested in their lives. Those kids that are so bad in so many other classes were good in my class because I care. I can relate to the kids.

The relationship that Brian establishes with his students does not end when they leave the middle school. It is not uncommon for high school students to visit him or to return as student aides and assist with clerical tasks in his classroom.

Many students, through on-going support and encouragement from Brian, also choose teaching for their career.

I had a college student tell Mr. Rye at a conference in Winona that I was the best teacher he ever had, and that he's going into teaching because of me. And that's, that's a pretty high compliment.

I know there are kids in my classes that will go into social studies education 'cause of me, and that's really nice, especially if they come back and they model some of the things they learned from me, then . . . that would make me proud.

The high success rate in inspiring students to learn has made Brian an advocate for those who have difficulty in other classes.

I've offered through other teachers to take kids who are problems because I just figured they wouldn't be for me, and they haven't been. So I've actually requested, and I've helped to arrange transfers of kids like that into my classes.

Although an experienced, successful middle level teacher, Brian continually strives to grow and improve his professional expertise. He has taken many classes beyond his Master's Degree to expand his knowledge base and reads religiously to remain updated on current events.

You must be on top of your profession. You need to keep up on what's going on, look at changes in your profession, the new material coming out. All these educational ideas have a lot of truth to them, and a lot of times teachers are reluctant to accept

that, but the fact is you've gotta pick out what's important in there and what you can use to improve yourself. And if you refuse to do that, like many people do, you are missing a golden opportunity to become a better teacher.

Brian Erickson and his wife have two children. Lane, 23, attends community college and is considering a career in the teaching profession. It is not surprising that the commitment to teaching and learning that personifies Brian has impacted the career aspirations of his oldest son. Danny, 16, a sophomore in high school, wants to be a rock star and have his own band. Because he is a talented musician, it is very possible that he will choose a career in the entertainment field.

Throughout most of their married life, Nancy Erickson has not pursued a career, choosing instead to be a full-time mother of her children. Recently she accepted a part-time job doing clerical work for a neighbor who owns his own business. When Danny graduates from high school, she will be ready to seek full-time employment.

Brian speaks warmly of his wife and considers her to be his main support system. It was she who encouraged him to follow his dream and become a teacher many years ago, and he credits Nancy's faith in him for much of his success. Because they were high school sweethearts and have been together so many years, Brian said he does not know what he would ever do without Nancy, his wife and best friend.

Brian expects to remain a teacher until he retires; there is nothing else he would rather do. He speaks of the profession in a hushed, reverent voice. "I think it's my God-given ability to teach, and that's my lot in life. I need to do that because somebody has to

do it. And so I see it almost as a . . . as a blessing." This strong sense of mission and the knowledge that he is making a vital difference to his students sustain Brian Erickson's lifelong commitment to teaching.

Greg Clark

Greg Clark, 44, is a colleague to Brian Erickson at Hillcrest Junior High, a rural school in a Midwestern state. He has had 18 years of experience teaching middle level students. After graduation from college in 1973, he taught one year at a private school in his hometown before he was hired to teach science at Hillcrest.

Greg is the oldest of 10 children, the only one to seek a higher education degree. Because his family was poor, Greg knew at an early age that he wanted to have a better life and perceived that education would open the door to more opportunities. When asked why he alone of all the siblings chose a different career path, he replied, "That's a very good question. I've often asked myself that same question. I enjoyed school. The adage that education would set you free--maybe that's what I was trying to do."

As a child, Greg attended a one-room school in a rural area, where students in grades 1-8 were taught by the same teacher. He felt confident of his ability to learn until he transferred to the high school in town during his ninth grade year. It was then that he became cognizant of his educational deficiencies. Greg remembered a teacher who announced the scores on spelling tests, identifying students by name. His score was always one of the lowest in the

class. He recalled thinking he was a competent speller in his former school and how traumatic it was to discover that, compared to other classmates, he was very inadequate. The teacher, who publicly acknowledged his limitations every week, instilled in Greg a compassion for students with learning disabilities that would personalize his teaching years later. Today in daily interactions with students in a rural school, Greg remembers the difference that one person can make to a frightened, insecure child, and he makes every effort to respond to students with gentleness and patience.

Greg's father worked in a ground quarry, and his mother stayed home to raise the children. Neither parent ever discussed college as an option while he was growing up. When Greg made the decision to continue post-high school study, the reactions he received were mixed. Some of the siblings did not question the decision--others accused him of being too lazy to get a job. He still feels the undercurrent of jealousy when he returns home for family visits, even after 18 years. Greg admitted that, although he has never regretted his decision to get a college education, it has not been easy being the "black sheep" of the family.

Greg married his wife Sherry in 1974. At the time they met, she was working in a large metropolitan area but returned to college to complete her degree in education shortly after they wed. He is happy that Sherry is a teacher because they share the same holidays, summer vacations, and professional goals. Because she teaches in an elementary school in his district, car pooling is an option when their

schedules permit. Greg notes, however, two disadvantages of being married to a teacher. Sherry's evening hours are consumed by lesson preparation and correction of papers even beyond his own professional commitments. Also, with two teachers in the family, their combined income is low compared to other working couples they know who have only one spouse in the profession. Despite the drawbacks, Greg is pleased that he is married to an individual who shares his desire for personal and professional growth.

Because Hillcrest Junior High had been a middle school until two years ago, Greg is aware of changes that have occurred with the transition when the elementary staff left the middle school with the sixth graders.

Elementary teachers bring a certain perspective to life, to learning, and to doing things in the classroom, and secondary teachers don't always do that. I really miss the . . . the spark, the enthusiasm, the ways of looking at things that elementary teachers have. It is very easy for a junior high to turn into a mini-high school.

Greg believes that core teams which will be in place next year will add a depth to the curriculum that will compensate for the loss of many good teachers. He is looking forward to the new challenge of working with colleagues on teams, where thematic planning can be done across the curriculum.

Greg has a strong sense of mission which causes him to reflect often upon his own role as instructional leader. He does not take his responsibilities lightly.

I realize that I'm the person that makes the difference. If students don't learn, it's not necessarily their fault because I'm

the person in charge. I assume responsibility for ensuring that every student learns in my classroom.

The relationships established with students are positive and sustain enthusiasm and a sense of renewal.

The easiest thing about teaching to me is you have students sitting there that really do have a desire to learn. They're excited about life. They're experiencing life. They don't understand it all, not that anybody ever does probably, but they're alive, full of energy.

Greg works hard to ensure that his class will be a positive experience for his students. "They feel success in my room. I work very hard for that." To maximize opportunities for success, he draws upon his knowledge of learning styles and tries to vary his instructional strategies to meet the needs of all learners. Greg also creates an invitational environment.

I'm constantly trying to . . . to improve the environment in my room where I do have control. I've even gone so far as to ask the principal for those broad spectrum fluorescent lights, because people are affected by not having sunlight.

A bean bag chair is a permanent fixture in one corner; a rocking chair is available for students who learn best kinesthetically. Assorted small animals and birds sustain the informal, relaxed learning environment while providing safe avenues for meeting affective needs.

Certain kids need the soft touch of a bean bag chair to get them through the day. I use animals a lot for learning styles. There are some kids that will get through a particular day's assignment by having a guinea pig sitting in their lap where they can stroke the little thing, and it squeaks back at 'em, gives 'em that little squeaking in the ears or the affection, whatever you wanna call it; and they'll do a better job.

Greg is committed not only to his students but also to his content area; he believes strongly that the study of science is important and relevant to middle level learners.

I know what I'm doing, first of all, does make a difference because of the material I present. Science makes a difference.

You're really gonna get one shot at some of these things in science, and this is my chance to do it, do it for them.

Greg's interest in science was developed early in life when, as a child living in the country, he walked to school each day. Memories linger as he recalls the beauty of seasonal changes while strolling through the woods, observing spring flowers or trees dressed in autumn's glory. Little animals scampering through the undergrowth of the forest, birds feeding their hungry babies in nests of twigs and leaves, all left an impression on his mind. Greg's love for nature and his curiosity about the natural order of the universe made choosing a career easy. By becoming a teacher, he would be able to share his love of science with others. Even today, Greg still marvels at simple pleasures that are part of the natural environment.

In some ways I think a good teacher is a person who doesn't grow up. I still . . . just, in fact, the other day I bought myself a little fish mobile to hang up on the ceiling. Here's a 44 year-old-guy, "Hey! This is great! I love this little fish mobile." And I'll be excited when I put it up. Some kids will be excited about it, too. They'll enjoy it. They'll look at it. Or find a little bird caller that makes squeaky noises and get the bird in my classroom to sing. I mean, that's a joy to me. And it's a joy to those kids, too. They like it. They wanna do it themselves and try to.

Teaching science, according to Greg, is not done by relying exclusively on a textbook but by giving students an opportunity to observe as many things as possible firsthand. He does not expect his

lessons to be linear; unscheduled things happen. Time is always available for a teachable moment.

The teaching of science is not linear. It's all . . . it's all weaved together. And things happen. Things come up. The bird laid an egg. I remember just last week, or week before I guess it was, the bird was standing up and the egg was coming out. And this girl saw it, and she said, "There's an egg coming out here." And I stopped, and we talked about it when it was happening. About half the kids got to go over and watch the bird.

Students not only read about animal reproduction, they often have opportunities to observe gerbils and other small creatures rear their young right in the classroom. Although they enjoy the contact with the birds and animals, Greg realizes that a blend between textbook reading and personal observation is the most effective way for middle level students to learn.

It'd be nice to do the whole thing completely experiential, but I've also learned that you can't do that day after day after day. You'd be gone in a year. The kids . . . the kids really don't like to do that all the time, either. They need some structured time also. And you can . . . you can sort of feel after we've done a few labs, like two or three days in a row, they're ready to sit back down again and get some structure.

Working with students who are receptive to new experiences provides Greg with feelings of accomplishment. He notes a positive, non-verbal way that he is reinforced in his work.

I remember the look in the children's eyes, I guess, and you touch them. You've gotten through. When you see the pathos in those eyes disappear, when you've touched them with something about science or yourself or learning or life in general, that's the things you remember.

Over the years Greg has influenced many students to continue their education and lifelong learning. He is proud when they choose science for their area of study.

One student I remember very well I had that went to private school in Marshall, and I attended a workshop maybe five years ago, and I saw this person. And I said, "I know that person." He was a former student of mine. He was teaching science now in Southview. And he said, "You got me started."

Because Greg is respected within the school by both administrators and colleagues, he is often asked for advice on classroom management, effective teaching strategies, and motivational techniques. "This is the artistry. It's very difficult to explain to someone what you do when it's a reflection of who you are, and someone generally can't duplicate what you do."

Flexibility is one of Greg's strengths as a teacher. Like the chameleon in his classroom, he can adapt to a changing environment with effortless ease.

A teacher has to do what a teacher has to do for learning to occur in that classroom. And if it's something silly and you're humoring them, or if you're entertaining them, well, then that's what you do.

Greg has a Master's Degree and has taken many additional courses to enhance his scientific understanding. He continually seeks ways to increase his effectiveness or satisfy the natural curiosity that has not diminished with the passing of time. "I'm at the point now in my career where I need to start going back and relearning some things, just for my own personal love of science."

Despite the success Greg has in inspiring students to learn, he never rests on past accomplishments. There are always ways to teach a better lesson or reach an unreachable child, and he is determined to do both. Greg is familiar with the developmental stages of early adolescence and realizes that what works today may not be effective

tomorrow because middle level students, like their fads and fashions, are ever changing.

You realize that you have been doing things correctly. It's working. How can you continue it? It's a kind of a double-edged sword. "Well, this is great, but what will I do tomorrow? How do I continue this?" You see that you . . . you've touched them, there's motivation, there's learning going on, they're excited about it, and you wanna capitalize on it and keep it going as long as you can, because you know in a few days a different set of hormones will kick in or a different level of everything could change just as easily. You have to be an opportunist.

As Greg reflects upon his fulfilling teaching career, he credits two people for their positive influence on his life.

There was a professor at the university who was instrumental in training teachers in elementary and secondary. His guidance and his philosophy of education really influenced me. He's responsible for my philosophy . . . that education is a process. It's a spark that kindles learning, especially for students who want to discover and want to learn.

Probably my wife would be my greatest professional asset, because she is very professional and has many great ideas. I consider her a model for myself with the ideas that she has.

Although Greg has had positive feedback from students and parents, a supportive administrator, and many years of success in the classroom, on-going personal and professional growth are critical components of his commitment to teaching. "If it would be an area of stimulation, of growth, of discovery, if it's something I could handle, I . . . could leave teaching, yes."

For the teaching profession to meet Greg's needs, it must continue to sustain his search for new understanding, exploration, and enlightened discovery. When these elements are no longer present in his teaching environment, it is very possible that this sensitive

educator will choose to share his love of science through another more responsive career.

Mary Lou Burch

Mary Lou Burch, 37, received a doctorate in Curriculum and Instruction a year ago from the local university in Brentwood, a community of 25,000 people in a Midwestern state. When I asked why a teacher of eighth grade language arts would seek an advanced degree, she smiled. "My husband tells me that one of my weaknesses is wanting to be a professional student. I love going to school. I also know myself pretty well in that I like a continual challenge." Throughout the duration of two interviews, it became apparent that Mary Lou's effectiveness as an educator related directly to the orchestration of change that to her was an essential ingredient of personal and professional renewal.

Mary Lou has been a language arts teacher for 15 years, 11 of which were spent in middle level schools. She also taught high school English, speech, dramatics, and reading for 4 years, providing her with a broad understanding of developmental stages that mark the passage to adolescence. It is this familiarity with the "total picture" that enables Mary Lou to fully appreciate the uniqueness of middle level learners. "I care about students. I feel like I understand students. I work for process, use content as a vehicle, but always try to be keenly aware of adolescent needs."

Mary Lou teaches at Riverdale Junior High School, which is one of two middle level schools in the district--the one that reflects the

greatest socioeconomic diversity. Most of the 500 students in grades 7-8 are bussed in from the lower economic area of the city, where they share classrooms with those from exclusive housing developments or luxury homes. Despite the wide range of economic diversity, the student population is, for the most part, Caucasian. Only 5% of the middle level students have minority status. A neighboring community, known historically as a leader for Civil Rights in the state, is the preferred location for the majority of Blacks and other people of color who move into the area.

Because teachers at Riverdale wanted students to have opportunities to interact with peers from diverse ethnic backgrounds, an exchange was arranged with another school known for the diversity of its population. Students from Riverdale spent a day attending classes at Jackson Junior High, and an equal number from Jackson visited Riverdale. Although there was some apprehension among students who participated in the exchange, the results were deemed positive and worthwhile; further visits will be scheduled in the future. For many Riverdale students, it was their first interaction with minority teachers--which Mary Lou believes was in itself a valuable learning experience in preparation for adult life in a global society. "I work very hard with my students as well as my own children and say, 'You can do anything, be anything.' And I work diligently to teach them that they're part of the international community."

A strong mission to teach has been reinforced over the years through positive feedback from parents, students, and administrators.

She was a student that I felt needed to have my hand on her shoulder all the time. She really did need the physical contact. Some days I . . . I felt like, if she'd just walk around the classroom with me, we would make it. She was easy for me to work with, but I didn't feel like I had impacted her outlook on life. And then the next year, it was November, and I'd seen her a few times and talked to her. But she left school in November, and the day she left, she brought me a letter saying I had changed her life, and I didn't even know.

Aware that affective as well as cognitive needs must be addressed in the classroom, Mary Lou tries to nurture positive attitudes that build self-esteem. "I always say I will not force, push, drive junior high students. I will nurture, encourage, suggest."

Mary Lou was raised in a home where education was valued, and high expectations were the norm. Although neither parent graduated from college, her father, despite much financial hardship, attended for 1 year. He was forced to work at three different jobs to earn the money necessary for expenses. A farm accident that occurred the summer following his freshman year prevented him from working and earning the money needed to return to college in the fall. Her father still has fond recollections of that year in school, Mary Lou stated. Her mother, a beautician, sought specialized coursework in cosmetology after graduation from high school. Mary Lou credits her parents for being active, supportive role models.

My earliest recollections of talking about school at home included parents who were very involved, always curious about what I was doing, very demanding, unwilling to hear any of my complaints, and always dwelling on the positive. My father served on the Board of Education of our school for 21 years. And even now, when I'm 37 and the baby of the family, my parents rarely miss a basketball

game at the high school. So they've always been involved with the school and education.

Her older sister Jean, who is also a teacher, became a role model early in life. Mary Lou recalled making bulletin boards for Jean when she was in high school, already dreaming of the day she would be creating them for her own classroom. Although some people view the two sisters as competitive, Mary Lou disagrees and notes the positive ways they have influenced each other. Jean also decided to pursue a doctorate after Mary Lou shared her plan to return to school. With both of them enrolled as doctoral students at the same time, they were able to provide support for each other and maximize their learning opportunities. Mary Lou considers Jean more than a sister; she is also a friend.

Mary Lou has been married to John, her middle school sweetheart, for 15 years. They intentionally attended different colleges to find out if they really wanted to spend their lives together. They were wed immediately after graduation from college, eager to share the same professional dream.

John started out in education and echoed Mary Lou's excitement for teaching. While student teaching, he would say, "I just love teaching kids who want to learn." Mary Lou responded, "If you can't make that a compound sentence, don't go into the teaching profession, because some of them don't want to learn." By the end of his student teaching experience, when motivating the unmotivated became a major frustration, John decided to forsake teaching to pursue a career in business. He is presently a loan officer in a local bank. Even

though his teaching dreams did not provide the fulfillment he had hoped, John continues to be supportive of Mary Lou's commitment to teaching and personal growth.

Mary Lou's oldest son attends Riverdale Junior High, but he will not have his mom for a teacher. This, she shared, was the result of her request that Billy be placed in another language arts class. It was a mutual decision, and Billy is now more comfortable with the informal contact he and his mother have from being in the same building. Joey, her youngest son, attends the elementary school next to Riverdale. Both boys are good students and are excited about their mom's opportunities now that she has an Ed.D. Degree. Mary Lou said, "They see change as exciting and challenging," reinforcing her own positive attitude and philosophy.

The idea of burnout is inconceivable to Mary Lou, who continually changes methodology, curriculum, and her approach to classroom management. By keeping her options open, by seeking out new educational opportunities, she remains enthusiastic and positive about teaching and helping young adolescents learn. —

I have been fortunate to have enough changes and variations and enough educ . . . experiences of my own, higher education, to keep me fresh. Every time I have started to question whether this is what I should be doing, there's been some significant change in my life that's made me realize that I really love being in the classroom.

Mary Lou provides students with challenges at the appropriate level of difficulty so that they can succeed and reach new heights of accomplishment. She reflected, "You work with each of them like they

have a great potential." She continually monitors and adjusts instructional strategies to better accommodate learner needs.

I think students see me as someone who allows them to grow in the classroom, who encourages and demands that they grow in the classroom, who is responsive to their personal needs as well as modifying it . . . instruction to meet their needs.

The positive feedback and dedication to students that personify Mary Lou's approach to teaching have not gone unnoticed. Mary Lou continues to hear from students who were in her classroom 15 years ago. The impact she has had on the lives of students is far reaching; one can never tell where her influence stops.

Last year Mary Lou received the Gold Star Teacher Award in recognition for her contributions to the teaching profession. That she had received multiple nominations from students was a special joy. Her sister, Jean, who had received the same award 2 years previously, was equally thrilled.

Despite Mary Lou's appreciation for young adolescents who so readily invite her into their lives, this may be her last year working with middle level students. The lure of university teaching beckons, and she is not one to shrink from change or new challenges. It is this on-going quest for self-actualization that enables Mary Lou to thrive in the teaching profession.

Paula Wood

Paula Wood, 37, was called to serve others, to share her basic-Christian belief system through involvement with people. Her unusual career history reflects this calling and commitment. Paula approaches teaching as a ministry, a way to touch student lives through

activities that nourish their growth as caring, responsible human beings and recognizes the importance of her contribution to the process. "I think what I do is important and is meaningful, and that it has a purpose in the larger scheme of things."

Before Paula graduated from college with a degree in secondary education, her career goal was to teach social studies at the high school level. She had done volunteer work for several years with a non-denominational organization called Young Life that focused on relational ministry with high school students. Because she enjoyed helping young people feel good about themselves, she decided that teaching would provide opportunities for her to make a difference in their lives. This career choice shifted after a shattering student teaching experience.

Paula was assigned to student teach in an inner-city school in the 1970s, when turmoil and challenge of authority were not uncommon. Because she had done camp counseling with inner-city youth and had years of experience interacting with high school students through her work at Young Life, Paula was eager to continue her ministry in an educational setting. She was not prepared for fighting and swearing in the halls, racial tension and confrontations in the classroom, and an unsupportive administrator. After weeks of disappointment and frustration, her desire to teach was extinguished. It was then that the decision was made to abort her teaching career.

Paula decided to continue her education at Luther Seminary, where she received a Master's Degree in Theology. During her schooling, she

remained actively involved with Young Life, and upon completion of her advanced degree, accepted a full-time staff position there.

At the end of 4 years, organizational changes were being made at Young Life which caused Paula discomfort. She decided to resign from full-time ministry and remain a volunteer and began searching for another social service related job. After a period of time and reflection, she made a decision to give teaching another try.

Paula was hired in a temporary position at Crosslake High School upon the death of a teacher. She remained on staff for an additional year until budget constraints cut her position, causing her to once again seek employment. She was offered a position as a social studies teacher at Kent Junior High, a suburban school in a Midwestern state, where she has resided for the past 9 years.

Four children, all of whom graduated from college, are in Paula's family. Her older sister received a degree in social work, while the younger sister and brother earned degrees in business. Although the two sisters are home raising their families, one also finds time to operate an inner-city preschool.

It is not difficult to determine that Mr. and Mrs. Kline were role models for all the children. Mr. Kline graduated from college with a degree in business and worked for a large corporation until his early retirement at age 57. Mrs. Kline quit law school to get married, a decision she always regretted. At that time the law program was a 6-year commitment, and she had only completed 3 years of school. After her family was raised and all had graduated from high school, Mrs.

Kline returned to college to complete her degree. She was later employed by the Governor's office as an administrative assistant to the Lieutenant Governor, where she presently works today.

Mrs. Kline, who has been an active volunteer in church and political activities for years, has been a role model for Paula. It was her mother's passion for politics that eventually led to Paula's interest in history and political science. "I always thought I would continue the law, and so far, I have not chosen to do that." Because both parents are faithful volunteers, committed to community service, they encouraged their children to choose careers in helping professions. This element of serving others has been a part of Paula's consciousness for as long as she can remember.

Paula has been married for 3 years to her husband Kirk, whom she met on a blind date. He is self-employed and has two businesses. One is an importing business where he works with a partner in Hong Kong and gets premium promotional items made. He also has a commercial snow removal business with 150 contracts. Although Kirk has different career interests, Paula relates that his dependence on a higher power and genuine concern for people are the glue that binds their relationship together. A recovering alcoholic, his faith and value system complement Paula's strong sense of mission.

Paula is a colleague to Pat Berry at Kent Junior High School, although they are not well acquainted. Because they teach in different departments in the largest middle level school in the state, it is understandable. Over 100 teachers and 30 paraprofessionals are

on staff to serve 1800 students in grades 7-9. The school has both advantages and disadvantages, according to Paula. "If I had children, I'd love for them to attend Kent because of the staff--but would not want them to come here because of the size."

Because district educational leaders were concerned about meeting the diverse needs of the large student body, they have been studying a middle school concept for the past 2 years. Next year, after careful analysis and deliberation, Kent will become a middle school with grades 6-8. Ninth graders will continue their education at the high school. To reduce the sense of anonymity within the vast population, students and teachers will be assigned to core teams to create a "school within a school" climate. Paula has been a member of the task force which makes recommendations to the principal on issues of concern regarding the transition. She feels the middle school concept will be a positive change and looks forward to working with colleagues on teams and getting to know students better.

That's why I'm excited about the middle school, 'cause I think there are those opportunities . . . there will be more opportunities to interact with kids in settings that are not traditional classroom.

Kent Junior High operates within the framework of a 7 period day, with each period lasting 55 minutes. Paula teaches eighth grade geography and ninth grade political science 5 periods a day. She likes her schedule because of the diversity in working with two grade levels.

I've taught probably a new prep almost every year I've taught. I have always liked having at least two preps. I feel like I learn

so much. I am teaching geography for the first time in five or six years, and so it pushed me to learn and explore.

Because of a room shortage, Paula shares a classroom with another teacher for 1 period, an inconvenience she has learned to live with.

All staff are assigned an extra duty for 1 period a day, and Paula's assignment is to supervise the lunchroom. She voiced strong feelings about the inequity of these assignments and is dismayed that there has been no attempt to make them equitable. Study hall assignments are coveted by most staff, because once roll is taken, teachers can correct papers or prepare lessons for the following day. Computer lab monitors also have most of the hour free to do their own work. The dreaded duty is supervising the lunchroom, which Paula has had to do for the past 2 years. Because many teachers have not had this extra duty assignment, she feels her reappointment is unfair. "If you complain, you get what you want." Paula chooses not to complain.

Paula is cognizant of the developmental stages that mark the passage to adolescence. She believes that, not only must students be challenged intellectually, but they must be nourished in the affective realm as well.

I think it is a real crucial time in kids' lives, and therefore I think that a middle level teacher needs to be aware of that, addressing that. Content is important, but, you know, it is important to address students as whole people, and that we are not just addressing them intellectually but also emotionally, physically, spiritually.

She perceives her mission as a teacher is to be a catalyst for learning, to help students feel comfortable with themselves in an

educational context. "My mission is to encourage kids to learn, to encourage kids to like themselves, to be a part of the process and to know that I am part of the process."

Paula's mother calls her a "natural-born teacher." What does this mean to Paula? "I think what's natural is liking kids and wanting to be around . . . you know, be with them. The naturalness is just caring about kids and being comfortable with 'em." She is able to convey enthusiasm and joy for learning that enables students who approach her content area with trepidation to overcome their anxiety, which often results in surprising success.

I have kids coming in with . . with an attitude that "I . . . I don't do well in social studies." I have lots . . . I have kids like that . . . that by the end of the first quarter they're like "Wow, I can do well!"

Paula's professional commitment to middle level students was tested when she had the option to teach the ninth graders at the high school next year.

I had the option to go to the high school. I am a ninth grade teacher. And nobody . . . hardly anybody can believe that I chose this when I had a chance to move up. And so I am obviously very committed to this age.

Her positive experiences with students are not always shared by other colleagues, who find this age group difficult and stressful. "Some people say they have these horrible years, and maybe I will have one of those some year where I'll have a group of kids that . . . but I haven't so far."

Paula enjoys exchanging professional ideas with other colleagues and notes the strong support system that enables her to grow.

I've been lucky, because, especially with the ninth grade teachers I've worked with, they've been some real . . . it's been just a great experience of . . . of sharing and working together and learning from each other.

I have a lot of friends; I have a lot of support. So I think that that adds to my overall well-being, which brings me into my career, my job, in a good place.

Paula's relationship with the principal has been one of personal and professional respect.

I feel respected and valued. I haven't needed the administration to support me in a setting like with a parent or something like that. I know there have been situations where teachers have felt they could have been more supported or that. . . but it is not a major problem. Yeah, I feel supported.

As Paula reflects upon the 10 years she has been in the profession, she notes with sadness the changes that have occurred since she first began teaching: more students live in single parent homes; a rise in teenage pregnancies; the terrifying increase of youth suicides; and the number of kids who are physically or emotionally abused. Paula is haunted by faces of at-risk students who are in desperate need of help but are absent so often that efforts to intervene on their behalf are ineffective. "It doesn't seem very optimistic at all . . . to think of trying to address the needs of society in a society that seems to be trying to destruct itself."

Paula recognizes schools as the single common denominator for all children--the one institution that has the opportunity to counteract some of the social ills of society. Although she does not like to see teachers assume greater parenting responsibilities, she realizes that, in many instances, there is no other way to break the cycle of

hopelessness and despair that exist for some students who are so desperate for someone to care.

Because Paula feels within herself a calling to serve others, the teaching profession provides her with ample opportunities to make a difference. As long as she perceives her role to be purposeful and significant in the larger scheme of life, it is likely that Paula will remain committed to her ministry of teaching.

Jim Nichols

Jim Nichols, 36, has been a middle school teacher for 15 years in a small rural school in a Midwestern state. Despite his enjoyment of teaching today, he nearly left the profession twice. During his first year, the students assigned to him were so unruly that classroom management was a constant battle of wills.

I came in the middle of the year for a very popular teacher, and his students were challenging. I was down in a study hall, for example, classes weren't as bad. I had a study hall of 60 kids. That about drove me crazy. It was one of the things I was . . . I tell the students, too . . . you know, if you hate your job, it doesn't matter how much money you make. I look back at that first couple-three months, and I hated it. Getting up in the morning it was like, I've got to go through this again. So the first year and a half, I didn't know if I belonged here or not. I didn't know if I really liked it.

Jim credits his principal for helping him through those difficult times as both a mentor and a friend. If it had not been for his support, Jim may have quit teaching at the end of his first year.

If there was one person that influenced me in education, it's Bob. He was the principal that was here. And he had a time, especially those first couple of years I related to, he hung in there with me and instead of being real critical, he was real supportive. I know my study halls weren't run according . . . especially you learn those things after a time . . . my study halls were not being run the way he wanted them to be run. But yet instead of

being real down on me and everything, he came in and just offered suggestions.

There's just something about . . . we just hit it off. We got along real well and you know, kind of a father-son type of thing . . . at least that's the way I kind of looked at it.

Despite the 2-year teaching nightmare, things eventually fell into place, and teaching became not a job that was hated, but one that instilled in Jim a strong sense of mission.

My feelings are you can be a good teacher if you love kids and if you are willing to put yourself in their place a lot of times . . . to be empathetic with them . . . to feel what they're going through. If you do that, they know you care. If they know you care, they'll do anything for you. You see, it works both ways.

Last year for the second time in his career Jim lost his commitment to teaching. He wanted to expand his horizons by seeking new challenges outside of the profession.

Wouldn't you like to prove to yourself you could do something different . . . that you're not geared into this job, you're not locked into it . . . that you have other things that you could be good at? It would be a shame that if you die and you don't ever try anything different.

Although he had taken the tests needed to become an investment broker and planned to make a career change at the end of the school year, circumstances again intervened so that this transition was never completed. His mother-in-law became seriously ill with cancer and was given only 6 months to live. Jim did not think he could handle the stress of a new job while dealing with a family crisis, so he postponed his plans for a career change. Now, a year later, this decision has brought peace of mind and a new sense of professional contentment. Jim is recommitted to teaching and is no longer plagued

by the restlessness and hunger for change that nearly derailed his teaching career.

I have a new philosophy and that's one day at a time. So as of right now, I'm really content. I'm content with what I do. Whether I'll be content tomorrow or a month from now, I guess that doesn't matter. It's a day-by-day thing.

Northland Middle School is one of the smallest rural schools in a Midwestern state, and for the past several years, talk of consolidation has been a dark cloud looming on the horizon. Jim foresees the handwriting on the wall and expects that the time will come when a merger among small neighboring schools will occur. Although the staff at Northland can see advantages to consolidation, they do not want to lose their school. This concern was on Jim's mind at the time of our first interview.

Because the Middle School is connected to the high school, many of the teachers are shared. There are 750 students enrolled in grades 7-12 and about 150 of them are middle level students in grades 6-8. Eight full-time staff teach core subjects in the Middle School whereas physical education, music, and art classes are taught by share-time teachers at the high school. For all practical purposes, the sharing of staff seems to work well, and in some instances, is a positive experience. Jim notes how the music teacher works diligently with the Middle School band students because he realizes that they will continue their music studies at the high school under his direction. This continuity in teaching has resulted in a strong music program which Jim believes was enhanced through share-time teaching.

Northland Middle School has an 8 period day. Classes begin at 8:15 a.m. although teachers are expected to be on duty at 7:45 a.m. Jim's schedule provides a large diversity of grade levels as he is one of the share-time teachers with the high school. He teaches three sixth grade social studies classes, two eighth grade American history sections, and a high school humanities class that alternates with study hall every other day. Because Jim is the department head, he has 2 preparation periods a day, 1 to coordinate departmental issues and concerns. Jim also advises high school students who participate in Academic Decathlon after school. "I enjoy that; it's a chance to get to work with high school students." He finds the variety of professional responsibilities exciting, a positive feature of being on staff in a small school.

Teaching in a rural school feels comfortable to Jim, who attended rural schools while growing up. He has a strong sense of connectedness to the area and community because of his family background.

Jim was raised in a middle class family. His parents were meat cutters, and they owned their own locker plant. Jim and his younger brother Joe were encouraged to attend college after graduation from high school, but Joe decided to become a meat cutter and follow the family tradition. At the urging of his parents and high school sweetheart, who later became his wife, Jim agreed to give college a try. "They said, 'Why don't you try school and see if you like it?'

And it was one of the best accidents I ever had in my life. They encouraged me to go to college, and I stumbled into the teaching." Jim is, he believes, the first person on both sides of his family to earn a college degree, an accomplishment that is noted by his parents with much pride. Although he does not have a Master's Degree, he has taken additional coursework over the years. One summer he took counseling classes, which he felt helped him become a more effective teacher. He also took business classes for personal enrichment and some history courses to expand his knowledge base. "I enjoy taking different kinds of classes here and there to broaden my horizons, so to speak."

Jim and his wife have been married for 15 years. They have two daughters, Julie, who is in seventh grade and Linda, a third grader. Kim Nichols is a registered nurse who works part time in an area hospital close to home. This schedule allows her to be available for the girls, which is important to both parents.

Because Northland is a small school, it was inevitable that Jim's children would someday become his students. This year Julie is in her dad's sixth grade social studies class. Jim worried at first that the situation could become awkward and made certain that he did not give his daughter more attention than any of the other students. To his knowledge, things have worked out well, and he speaks of the special delight it has been to see Julie through different "eyes" this past year.

Jim has not forgotten how traumatic the middle level years can be. He recalled the heartache of being obese as a young adolescent. The ridicule and rejection from peers, the exclusion from social events, even a careless, insensitive comment made by a teacher continue to haunt him 25 years later. Jim shared his humiliation and pain when a favorite teacher made reference to Jim's oversized body during class. In retrospect, he is certain the teacher meant no harm, nor was he being intentionally cruel. But to a young adolescent who lacked self-esteem and hated his ungainly appearance, the "humorous" comment hurt deeply. The scar remains today.

Jim remembers his lack of confidence and insecurity during the middle level years whenever he looks into the eyes of an overweight student. He takes special care to provide positive reinforcement whenever appropriate, because he knows that the happy smile a large child displays to his peers is often just a mask to hide the pain within. Jim vows that he will never use humor at the expense of a student's dignity, and this sensitivity to others enables those in his classroom to learn in an educational climate that is respectful and emotionally safe.

Deeply devoted to his students, Jim speaks often of the little things that they do which result in feelings of accomplishment and job satisfaction.

Really, the human spirit requires so little food to keep people going. It's amazing that one person, the right person especially, telling you just simply that you're doing a good job, is worth more than any amount of money.

Jim enjoys the challenges of teaching and continually seeks ways to improve his expertise so that he can meet the diverse learning needs of his students.

I think teaching is a challenge every day. That's one of the things that keeps it from being boring. Just when you think you've got . . . you know, just when you think you have the students figured out, young people figured out, there is always another character that comes into your room. So I find it extremely challenging.

Personal and professional growth are of critical importance to Jim, who is always searching for new answers to old problems.

It's this fear, at least for me it is. It's the fear of not always being better or getting better. The fear of getting into a rut, the fear of not doing things differently; it scares me so it keeps me motivated.

Three years ago Jim was nominated by the Jaycee's as an Outstanding Educator of the Year. Although he did not win the award, he felt honored to be recognized in such a positive way for his teaching accomplishments. Jim did not allow this recognition, however, to detract from his commitment to lifelong learning. "I don't think you can rest on your laurels, or somebody tells you that you're a good teacher--fine. That was last year. What are you going to do this year?"

Jim believes that humor is a component of his teaching style that contributes to his effectiveness as a middle level teacher.

I think the ability to be effective at teaching is to know that it is a science but make it look like an art. . . Many times I think of myself not just as a teacher but as an entertainer.

I think you have to be a little bit crazy to teach in the middle school. I think you have to be a little bit "off the wall."

He wants his class to be fun and tries to incorporate humor whenever he can to entice student interest in the lesson.

I want them to enjoy being in my class. I want them in here feeling like they belong, feeling that . . . like I tell them, "Hey, whoever said that you can't enjoy working . . . whoever said that you can't come in and have fun while you learn?"

By striving to make learning fun yet relevant for his students, Jim continually challenges himself to be more innovative in his instructional strategies. This on-going process is rejuvenating and sustains his enthusiasm for teaching.

Would he consider leaving the profession at this point in his career?

I don't think so. I really enjoy what I'm doing here, and I really enjoy the kids. The burning desire I had to leave is no longer there. I guess everybody gets the itch once in awhile, but it's not because I dislike what I was doing. It's, I guess you could say, I was getting the "middle-age itch." I hated to think that I wouldn't try anything else in my life. I've taught since I was out of college, and I thought that, you know, sometimes you feel like you need a new challenge in life.

If Jim can continue to grow personally and professionally through his educational experiences, it appears likely that he will remain committed to teaching. Only time will tell if his present contentment will outweigh the yearning for change that nearly caused him to leave the profession at the peak of a successful career.

Cindy Schafer

Cindy Schafer, 44, is a colleague to Jim Nichols and has been at Northland Middle School for the 12 years she has been in the profession. Her entry into teaching was delayed and unplanned. After graduation from high school, her only ambition was to get a job and

earn money, so college was never a priority. She married her high school sweetheart at age 19 and had two children. It was while they were young and she began volunteering her time at the elementary school that Cindy realized how much she enjoyed working with kids. Because of her husband's support and encouragement, Cindy enrolled in the local university to get her teaching degree. "He kept after me and encouraged me to do it. I never would have, if it hadn't been for him."

Twelve years later, Cindy recalls the negative feedback she received from her high school principal when he found out she was going back to school. The principal was unsupportive and tried to discourage her because he believed she was "too old" to begin college at age 28. Cindy did not take his prediction to heart and worked very hard in her studies to prove him wrong. Because of her efforts, Cindy graduated with honors.

Bill Schafer, Cindy's husband, works on an assembly line for a large manufacturing company. Because he began employment immediately following graduation from high school, he will have 30 years of experience accrued in 4 1/2 years, which enables him to qualify for early retirement. If Bill chooses this option, he would like to go to college. Cindy mentioned that his company pays two thirds of the tuition costs for employees who extend their education, so she is encouraging Bill to enroll in college now while he can receive this financial assistance.

The Schafers have two children. Susan, 24, is a graphic designer who graduated from a state university. Larry, 23, attended the same university and graduated with a degree in advertising and communication. Both of them are doing well in their careers.

Cindy's parents attended country schools and never went beyond an eighth grade education. They were poor farmers, struggling to raise seven children on a limited income. Cindy recalls that education was not a priority in her family. One of her brothers borrowed money to attend college but only remained a year. He was overwhelmed by the expectations and lacked the self-discipline necessary for academic success. Some of the other boys dropped out of high school to work at various odd jobs. Cindy, the exception, earned a college degree that enabled her to prove to herself and others that it is never too late to get an education.

Cindy perceives that her parents had three separate families, because of the age differences among the siblings. There were five boys, then 6 1/2 years later, she was born. The birth of her youngest brother, when Cindy was 6, completed the family. There were advantages to being the only girl of seven children. Her mother said she was "spoiled," and Cindy recalls that her brothers would take her to movies and ball games. Other times she would just tag-along, and they would include her or exclude her, as their whims dictated. Cindy said, "I think I was harder on my younger brother than my older brothers were on me." The childhood memories of growing up in a large family are priceless to Cindy because their years together were so

few. Three of her brothers died at early ages. Two deaths were caused by alcohol-related diseases; the youngest brother, Cal, was killed in a motorcycle accident when he was 17. Since Cal was the "baby" of the family and closest in age to Cindy, who was the second youngest, this was an especially trying time. Losing three brothers is a heartache that still causes her pain.

Cindy admires her older brother Peter, a professional window washer who is also mayor of a small town in the state. He and his wife are very involved in the arts and became co-owners of the Art Guild in their community. They bought an old church, renovated it, and transformed it into a museum where various classes are given. Peter is active on the town council and has won several awards for community service.

When Cindy got her teaching degree and reading licensure for grades K-9, she expected to teach elementary students. Her volunteer work had been with young children, and her student teaching experience had been with fourth graders. When a position for a reading and language arts teacher became available at Northland Middle School, however, Cindy decided to apply. Even though she was "scared to death" to work with seventh graders, Cindy soon became very committed to young adolescents.

I would not go to the lower levels for anything unless I absolutely had to. I really enjoy this age. I really feel you can be yourself at this level, and also the kids are developing a sense of humor, and lots of times you can joke with kids about things that . . . it gets them out of their bad mood.

Cindy teaches reading to students in grades 6-7 and has not taught language arts since her first year at Northland. She is strongly convinced that her role as instructional leader can influence students to develop an appreciation for reading, which may become a lifelong enrichment activity.

My mission is to foster a love for reading. Most of the students I have, by the time they get to the sixth grade, can read, unless they are dyslexic or, you know, have attention deficit or something like that. But many of them, when they get to this age, quit reading. And hopefully, I can foster a love for reading and also knowledge that they can find answers to their problems or questions through reading.

Previously, Cindy taught reading to all the students in grades 6-8. But this year, as department chair, she was given an additional preparation period and lost her eighth grade reading class. Cindy was not pleased.

Part of the trade-off for being department chair is to get an extra prep. I requested that I didn't . . . I would . . . I said I'd be department chair, if I didn't have to have an extra prep, 'cause I really enjoy seeing the transition from sixth to eighth grade. I like the . . . like, you know, it's like closure for me. But I got the extra prep instead.

There is little racial diversity in the student/staff population at Northland. Last year one African American was enrolled in the Middle School; this year an Asian American attends. Both of them, Cindy related, are adopted by White families. In the community of 1500 people, all the residents are Caucasian and come from middle to upper-middle class socioeconomic backgrounds. Because the Middle School staff wanted students to become cognizant of different cultural and ethnic backgrounds, they became partners with Jackson Junior High, a neighboring school with a large racial diversity. An exchange was

planned so that students from Northland could attend classes at Jackson one day while a group from Jackson visited Northland. Many students volunteered for this first exchange, and teachers were pleased to provide an opportunity for them to interact with minority teachers and peers. A future exchange between the two schools is likely.

Because Northland Middle School is so small with its enrollment of 150 students, the current principal was hired as a part-time administrator/part-time teacher. In addition to administrative duties, the principal teaches two classes a day. Cindy recalled that when she first started teaching there 12 years ago, a full-time principal was on staff; but as incoming class sizes grew smaller and financial cutbacks became more common, the administrative position was reduced. Cindy perceives that, in light of economic constraints and shrinking enrollments, consolidation among small neighboring schools is inevitable.

Cindy finds teaching more satisfying today than it was when she first began her career. She credits this to experience and the opportunities she has had to grow both personally and professionally.

I think we get wiser as we get older. But I'm not a person that will do the same thing all the time. I'm not one to get comfortable with any particular program. I always like change, so I don't feel that just because I've been doing this for 12 years that I'm stagnant. I don't want to ever be that way. That's the time . . . that's when I'll retire.

Strong rapport with students is at the heart of Cindy's teaching. Positive relationships are developed through the effort expanded to accommodate special student interests and individual needs. For

Cindy, nothing is more exciting than to observe a youngster respond enthusiastically to a learning opportunity.

One of my students loves Gary Paulsen's books. And I'm not sure if you're familiar with Gary Paulsen. He's . . . he's whipping books out right and left, and I like his writing also. And we were invited to send some kids to a writers' workshop, and so I asked the . . . language arts teachers to nominate some students. He was not nominated as one of the students to go. Gary Paulsen's going to be speaking at this workshop, and so I asked his teacher if there was any way we could, you know . . . and she said, "Oh, he's as good a writer as some of the others. He could go, sure." And so I told the kids what they would be doing and what would be expected of them, and Jeremiah was glad that he got chosen to go. And I said, "But the good part is, the neat part is, they're gonna have a guest speaker." And I told them who. And I tell you, this kid jumped up and down and was so excited that . . . and his other . . . his other teacher said it took him, you know, all class period to get settled down. He was so excited about getting to see this author! And to me, that's exciting!

Cindy recognizes the importance of meeting affective as well as cognitive needs in her classroom and makes an effort to build self-esteem so that students will become confident of their ability to learn. Little things, Cindy noted, mean a great deal to middle level students.

[I] just show the kids that, you know, they're important to me. I try to greet them at the door when they come in or speak to them if I see them in the hall or ask them little tidbits about what's going on in their lives. I do think kids at this age oftentimes feel that nobody cares about them. And it's important to show them that we do.

Several role models in her life have inspired Cindy to become the teacher she is today. Two were teachers and one was her first principal, who provided the positive feedback and support so crucial to a first-year teacher.

Bob Johnson was my first principal here and was just a wonderful man to work for, always positive and gave me lots of . . . especially my first few years . . . lots of positive feedback and

was always supportive, no matter what. And you just always knew that you could count on him to support you and your decisions; a very fair person.

Cindy perceives that she is a role model for many of her students and takes this responsibility seriously. She is careful not to let personal problems interfere with her effectiveness or positive attitude towards teaching and learning. "I really feel like kids . . . that you shortchange kids if you've lost your enthusiasm for your job. And I feel very strongly about that."

Would she ever leave the profession? "I know that by the end of summer I am ready to go back to school. So why would I leave a profession that I enjoy?"

Cindy entered the profession at age 32 and immediately found her niche teaching young adolescents. Because of her expertise in developing close relationships with students and her success at orchestrating change which keeps teaching exciting and fresh, it appears likely that Cindy's commitment to the profession will be sustained.

Chuck Swanson

Chuck Swanson, 53, has been a middle level teacher for 33 years. For 32 years he taught science, physical education, and health at Hyland Middle School, a suburban school in the Midwest. This year, due to a reorganization of grade levels within the district, the eighth grade class moved to the high school and the fifth grade class was incorporated into the middle school. Thirteen teachers had an opportunity to transfer to the high school to teach the eighth

graders, and Chuck volunteered for the new assignment. He now teaches four eighth grade classes of physical science and one class of basic chemistry to sophomores, juniors, and seniors.

The move to the high school had its drawbacks. It meant leaving behind many good friends and having to prepare for two new subjects. I asked Chuck why he would choose to transfer to a new school under these conditions at this stage of his career. He replied simply, "I guess for the sake of change."

Before this year Chuck had considered taking early retirement at age 55 so that he could travel and pursue leisure activities with his wife. He admitted now that he may reconsider and postpone this decision because the change in his teaching assignment has been so delightful.

I certainly have been kept busy this year after 30-some years in the business. I have found this to be refreshing. I got out of a rut. Not that it was a big rut; but on the other hand, you did have all of your projects and stuff pretty well lined up at the beginning of the year as long as you have taught it previously for 12 years. This has been a goal that I have had as far as doing as good of a job that I can with brand new preps after 30-some years of teaching.

This year Kennedy High School serves 900 students in grades 8-12. Sixty-five teachers have classrooms that are clustered together by department and content areas. This facilitates sharing of resources and enables teachers to team teach with colleagues who are in close proximity. Math and science areas are on one floor, history and English on another. Music and art rooms are located on the third level. The computer lab, business classrooms, and physical education facilities are located at the end of the building.

Chuck finds the layout of the high school attractive and convenient and has only one complaint--no windows in the classrooms. This is particularly significant for him as a science teacher, because sunlight is essential to make things grow. After residing for 32 years in the "Glass Palace," the Middle School noted for its abundance of windows, Chuck finds this major difference annoying.

There is little diversity in the high school. All staff members are Caucasian, as is the student body, with few exceptions. Chuck cannot recall ever having worked with a colleague or administrator who was minority status.

Chuck and his wife have three grown children, all college graduates who attended K-12 schools in the district. Only his youngest son is a teacher. Bill, 29, chose the same content area as his father, graduated from his alma mater, and also teaches in the district. Chuck notes with satisfaction that Bill often asks his advice on educational matters. He believes that both he and his wife have been role models for their children. Mary, 30, works in a nursing home in a Western state, a career choice closely allied with her grandmother's nursing profession. Ben, 31, received a degree in Graphic Arts and resides with his family in the community. Chuck proudly shared pictures of his two small grandchildren, smiling broadly for the camera. The pictures were among many others on his desk of various family members.

Chuck's wife did not attend college but went into business for herself. She opened a decorating store that provided wallpaper,

paint, and window coverings to residents of the community. After 15 years of working six days a week and summers, she decided to sell her business in order to spend more time with her family. She now works part time in a local gift shop.

Mr. Swanson, Chuck's father, came to America from Sweden when he was 18 years old. He met his future wife, a registered nurse, in a large metropolitan area in a Midwestern state. They married and raised two children, Chuck and his brother. Education was held in high esteem by both parents, but the father, particularly, wanted his sons to obtain a college degree, perhaps to compensate for his own limited education.

My dad, when he came from Sweden, he had an eighth grade education as an immigrant. Then when he got his citizenship papers, he couldn't talk a word of English. He went to night school to learn English and get his citizenship papers. He definitely wanted his boys to have a college education.

Mr. Swanson eventually became a steam fitter, an excellent one, according to Chuck. He worked as a foreman on large projects such as churches, schools, and sporting arenas. He wanted his sons to have an easier life and believed that education would provide them with options that he never had. While his brother became a minister, Chuck chose teaching for his career, a decision that was reached almost by accident.

Chuck received a football scholarship to attend college, where he majored in business and education. Through coaching activities and opportunities to interact with kids, Chuck realized that his calling

was for teaching, not business. He credits athletics for opening the door to an educational career.

Coaching has been a part of his life for nearly 30 years. He has coached eighth grade and varsity football, and his varsity team won championships several times. Chuck finds it rewarding to work with students outside of the classroom because it affords an opportunity to get to know them on a personal level.

Because Chuck has been a teacher in the district so long, he now has children of former students in his classes. He considers this a special pleasure, particularly when he knows that many of these students enter his classroom upon request from their parents. No matter how long the time span, former students continue to acknowledge the difference he made in their lives. "Just the other night a kid I had back in 1962 (I have his son now) came up to me and said, 'I'll never forget what you told me in eighth grade, Coach.'" Chuck believes that his teaching has improved over the years because he can draw upon accumulated experience to enhance his lessons.

I feel good because I know I'm doing the right thing in the respect that I've got so much experience backing me now. Every day something new comes up because I can draw on that experience, and I can expound on it.

Drawing on my experience definitely, even in the field of discipline, has made teaching a more enjoyable situation. I think for the student more learning takes place. I know it is. I do things a lot different than I did 15 years ago.

Yet, despite a long history of successful teaching, Chuck still enrolls in classes to expand his knowledge base and increase his

effectiveness. "I'm, after 33 years, going back to school to pick up some credits that I think are definitely going to help my students."

Chuck had many role models who encouraged his professional growth. The first principal he worked with was recalled with fondness; his father's commitment to learning was an inspiring example for him to follow. The advisor of his Master's program was also acknowledged, as was his wife, without whose help Chuck would not have finished graduate school. He also makes reference to supportive colleagues, who recognized his accomplishments when they chose him last year as the Middle Level Educator of the Year. This honor, Chuck stated, was one of the highlights of his teaching career.

Chuck's teaching style is based on a respect for students as learners; his mission is to ensure that everyone leaves his classroom with positive self-esteem. Through modifying lessons, using peer tutors or varying instructional strategies, Chuck maximizes opportunities for students to succeed.

I try to make it so that kids have some feeling of accomplishment. Whether they can only read two words or read two million words, I adjust myself to a student no matter which end of the spectrum, to make that philosophy of mine come true.

Despite 33 years of successful teaching, Chuck Swanson had no difficulty recalling an incident that caused him remorse. He talked of the bantering that took place with students before class, the teasing and positive interaction that make teaching such a joy. Chuck mentioned that it was not uncommon in these informal situations to respond to students by saying, "Whatever you say, Chief, you're the boss." On one particular occasion, Chuck remembers making that remark

to a Native American, who looked at him strangely. Had the student interpreted the remark as a racial slur? Had he felt belittled by a teacher he held in such high esteem? Chuck is uncertain of how the boy processed the comment, but knowing that he may have unintentionally crushed a child's spirit still troubles him nearly 30 years later. "I never meant to hurt him. I called all the kids 'Chief' on occasion. If only I could erase the look of pain that was in that student's eyes." The anguish internalized from this incident reveals the depth of compassion that is interwoven throughout the course of Chuck's teaching career.

That Chuck is a popular teacher and respected member of the community is not surprising, considering his long history of service in the district. A story he shared reinforces the positive relationships he maintains with others.

We used to have an old red convertible. We had a congressman named Mr. Smith, and he was in the parade and so he asked me to drive my car. He sat up on the back end. I'm driving down the street and "Hi, Chuck . . . Hi, Coach . . . Hi, Mr. Swanson." Then he, about halfway through the parade he said, "Chuck, why don't you let me drive and you sit up here?"

What keeps Chuck Swanson committed to teaching? He could list 7000 reasons--that is the number of students who have been in his classroom over the years. For Chuck, the magic of teaching comes through his close relationships with students, who, as adults in the community, become his lifelong friends. The richness of his professional experience continues to enhance his effectiveness, which reinforces his strong sense of mission to the young people in his care.

I asked Chuck how he would spend his time if he chose to take early retirement from teaching. He mentioned taking an extended trip to Sweden to get reacquainted with his father's family. Because his mother was an only child, these people are his only blood relatives, and Chuck would like to know them better. Other plans were uncertain. Substitute teaching was mentioned as an option, as well as coaching the football team. It appears likely that Chuck will remain connected to the profession he has served with distinction these past 33 years.

Pat Berry

"I knew it was my destiny to become a teacher," Pat Berry, 56, told me during our first interview. Her sisters are teachers, her brother started out as a teacher before being "wooded" away by the business world, her husband and his five siblings are teachers, and all except one married a teacher. That she comes from a strong teaching family background seems understated.

Pat's father attended a trade school after high school graduation and acquired the expertise as a heating engineer to establish his own business. Her mother, a graduate of business college, was a bank teller and church organist until retirement. Both parents were very supportive of education and expected all of the children to graduate from college. Their philosophy was clearly articulated to the children at an early age. School did not end at 12th grade; only after graduation from college would one's schooling be complete. They paid for tuition, books, room and board for each child as their contribution to higher education. "We weren't rich. We were very

middle class, but to both of them education was very, very important." Pat's mother, now 83, continues to remain actively involved in the educational arena. She volunteers time as a "Friend of the Library" on a regular basis, promoting an interest in reading through participation in a variety of activities.

Jerry, Pat's husband, worked for 1 year in a factory after graduation from high school. Because he did not want to spend his life working on an assembly line, he accepted a football scholarship and enrolled in a teaching program. His father's disability had prompted him to become the "active father" for the younger siblings, and one by one, they followed in his footsteps and became teachers. Coming from a lower socioeconomic background, with parents who had only an eighth grade education, Pat credits her husband for the positive influence he had on his brothers and sisters. He was, she noted, the role model in the family.

Pat's destiny to become a teacher was reinforced last year when she was chosen National Health Teacher of the Year. She was interviewed on radio and television, given a reception by her school district and church, and received over 100 congratulatory cards. Dozens of floral arrangements from supportive friends and family filled her home. Her prize was an all-expense paid trip to San Francisco for a week, at which time she received recognition at a luncheon held in her honor. Pat's husband accompanied her while her mother and nephew made secret plans for a surprise entrance at the luncheon. Pat's daughter, who lives in San Francisco, and her

boyfriend were also there for the award ceremony. It was, Pat states, the highlight of her long and successful teaching career. "I don't think anything is ever going to top this. I still feel very humble."

Pat and Jerry have three children, all college graduates. None, to their dismay, are teachers. I asked Pat if she knew why they had not followed the family tradition and she responded immediately, "I know why. I know why." Her children had often remarked while growing up that they were not willing to make the financial sacrifice or spend their evenings every night preparing lessons or correcting student papers. Tom, 29, has a degree in business management and works for a large trucking firm in the state. Jill, 27, who graduated with honors from her mom's alma mater, received a degree in finance and works for a personnel firm in San Francisco as a "headhunter." She interviews candidates for available jobs and is paid on commission. Ted, 23, will graduate with honors this spring with an aviation degree. Both Tom and Jill, Pat noted, are already earning salaries comparable to her own.

Pat has had a varied, non-traditional teaching career. She taught and did some counseling her first year at a high school in Wisconsin. Then she and her husband accepted an overseas position through the Department of Defense to teach in Germany for 2 years. Pat recalls the challenge of that job, where she taught grades K-6 to Americans in military schools. The excitement of living in a foreign country, the opportunities to tour Europe during summers, breaks, and weekends added to the richness of this professional experience.

When they returned to the United States, Pat was pregnant with their first child. She took a 5-year leave of absence from teaching to have her family. When she accepted a part-time teaching job for the next 4 years, two of her children were preschoolers and one was in school. She resumed her full-time schedule in 1978, when all the children were established in elementary school.

Pat has been a health and physical education teacher at Kent Junior High School, a suburban school in a Midwestern state for the past 22 years. Students in grades 7-9 comprise the clientele. Next year, due to reorganization, Kent will become a middle school which houses students in grades 6-8. Pat teaches in the largest school district in the state. Her middle level school is the largest of six; over 1800 students, 100 certified staff, and 30 paraprofessionals work together to provide quality education for young adolescents. Two African Americans, three Native Americans, and several Asian Americans provide the only racial diversity among the lower-middle class population.

To meet the needs of this large student body, the principal has two assistants, one of whom is always an intern. Four counselors, two male and two female, are available to provide guidance and support.

The junior high school building is 25 years old and has two parts: an older part with two stories and a newer part. The counselors' and administrators' offices are located in the older part of the building. The cafeteria is in the basement, a feature that Pat finds unattractive. Above the cafeteria is the gymnasium. The newer part

is only one story and includes two more large gyms and a complete science complex, which surrounds a small auditorium. The classrooms for social studies, language arts, and art are found at the back of the school. A math complex composed of six classrooms divided by partitions has the flexibility of becoming a large, open room. A centralized media center has ample resources to meet student and teacher needs. Two computer labs, one in the basement and one on the main floor are available.

Pat has been a consultant for the school district since 1979, when her full-time position of physical education and health was split. She became a half-time seventh grade health teacher and half-time health consultant. This new challenge did not result in a higher salary, but she received \$1200 additional pay that is given to department leaders. "You have to love this job because you certainly aren't paid for what you do." Her job responsibilities include teaching three health classes and chairing the health curriculum committees. She also previews videos/films and distributes those that are educationally sound to department leaders or other health teachers to use in their classrooms. Sometimes input is solicited from staff on films or videos that have been previewed; and based on the evaluations, new materials are purchased for the coming year. The curriculum committees operate on a 6-year cycle and make recommendations to the school board on texts and educational resources in the area of health education. In-service, which Pat arranges, is provided so that teachers can become familiar with available

resources. Staff members who volunteer time on the curriculum committees have opportunity to write curriculum, as well, for which efforts they are paid.

Although Pat enjoys the challenge of being a consultant, she has never found it to replace the satisfaction she derives from teaching.

There was a time when they were thinking of making this part of it as a full-time job or adding more to this job, and I said that they would have to find someone else in that case. I am not willing to give up my classroom.

Pat's relationship with students is one of the special things that makes teaching such a rewarding profession.

I kind of mother these kids, and I . . . I . . . say that positively because I think a lot of them need it, and it doesn't embarrass me to have them know that I'm old enough to be some of their grandmothers; but I like to get close to the kids. I love to talk to them, one on one.

Students remember her even after they have left her classroom and moved on to the next grade. Pat recalls the joy it brings when a former student stops by her room to visit.

You're standing on hall duty between classes or in the morning or whatever and some of these kids who are in eighth and ninth grade come up and talk to you or just say "hi" as they go by. There is nothing that makes you much higher than that. I mean, you know, they remember you, and they care enough to not just walk by and ignore you. They will greet you. And I'm not saying that every single kid does, but if one or two do a morning or between classes, that really makes you feel good. That's a high.

Pat seeks out opportunities to grow and often accepts challenges that will stretch her horizons and bring a new dimension to her teaching. This was why she chose to become a consultant, work with at least one student teacher a year for the past 20 years, and develop a mentor program for new teachers who join the staff. She also makes

presentations at national and state conferences, provides staff development to all the health teachers in her school district, and occasionally teaches a class at the local community college. She laughed when I mentioned burnout. "You certainly don't burn out when you're constantly going to something and learning new material. Maybe in some of the disciplines you don't have that choice."

Although she willingly shares her expertise with others whenever the occasion arises, Pat noted how much she learned through interactions with state department officials in her field and administrators who often became mentors. Working closely with colleagues also helped her grow.

Being able to work with the top was the best. Boy, that's gotta . . . you learn so much from them. And every one of those new teachers I worked with . . . plus, I have had at least one student teacher for the past 20 years, at least one a year and often more than one. And you learn so much from them.

Pat has a Master's Degree plus 60 credits and is at the top of the salary schedule, but she continues to seek new areas to explore for personal enrichment. "I'm still going to class, every Tuesday night."

Her positive attitude and opportunities to be around young people keep her young and excited about the profession. "I haven't been sick a day in years, mostly because of this; I don't want to be gone."

Pat reflected on two events that impacted her decision to become a physical education teacher.

I had polio when I was 11, when everybody had it. You know, a lot of [people in this state] had polio, and that's . . . I got it then, too. And I was in [the] hospital for about four months, and then I was at home for quite a bit, and anyhow, the whole time I was in [the] hospital, there were two things that we did besides sleep at night, and one of them was do therapy exercises and the

other was have our limbs wrapped in wet, hot towels. I got awfully good at flexibility and strength and . . . because I had to do all this building up of the muscles that were going to wither away if I didn't. And I honestly think that that's probably why I started out being interested in phy ed, because I was so good.

An opportunity that became available to her during high school also reinforced a desire to pursue physical education.

At my high school we were already just booming when I was getting ready to graduate, and our phy ed classes had like 60 and above in them, and those of us who were juniors and seniors who wanted to and with the ability, were teacher assistants. So I was a teacher assistant to a phy ed teacher. It was very, very positive.

After 29 years in education and national recognition of her teaching expertise, Pat will take early retirement at the end of the school year. But this does not mean she will "sit around and watch soap operas." Her reasons for leaving were twofold: she doesn't want to work 10 hours a day any longer, and she is ready for another change. Her plan is to seek a part-time job that will accommodate these parameters.

When word spread throughout the district of her plans for retirement, Pat had five job offers--three working in other schools on staff development activities, another training teachers to use the Quest materials developed by the Lion's Club, and teaching some courses for the police department. Although a final decision has not been made at this time, Pat is weighing her options carefully and looking forward to the future with happy anticipation.

Pat relayed to colleagues that her involvement on committees would be limited to the present school year since she would be retiring at the end of the year.

I said, "You know, Joan, I won't be here next year, so I don't know how involved you want me to be." And she asked me if I would be an ex-officio member and come to the meetings. And I said I'd love to.

What are her last thoughts about leaving behind the profession that she has enjoyed for 29 years?

There's gonna be a lot I'm gonna miss. But I do think I'm ready to move on. I'm vain enough that I want to go out when I'm on top. I don't want to be there when I'm not as effective as I am now. I don't wanna go downhill. And I'm just really looking forward to doing something else.

Pat Berry--experienced in teaching kindergarten through college level students in our country and abroad--is an educator extraordinaire. Although she has been committed to the profession for nearly 3 decades, enthusiasm has been sustained through on-going personal and professional growth. It is this hunger for change and challenge that led her to choose early retirement, which will open the door to new options and avenues of discovery.

Tommy Chung

"In China, education is not a right--it's a privilege." Tommy Chung, 46, knows of what he speaks. He was born and raised in Mainland China until he was 11 years old. Then the family moved to Hong Kong, where Tommy attended school and later graduated from college. In 1970, he came to America to continue his education at Glendale University for 3 years, majoring in comparative literature. It was during his dissertation year off that he interviewed for a position as Ambassador from China for a large urban school district in the Midwest. Tommy's assignment was to spread Chinese culture, language, and literature to the entire district, mostly through

teachers who would invite him to speak in their classrooms. Tommy held this position for 6 years, 1973-79, before the program was discontinued and he accepted a teaching position in the language arts department.

Cleveland High School, with its student body of 1600 and staff of 100 teachers, is the largest of three high schools in the district. The majority of students are Caucasian; only 10% are minority. Two African American teachers and one Asian American provide racial diversity. The socioeconomic backgrounds among lower, middle, and upper class students are evenly represented.

Although the building is 25 years old, it is the newest of the three high schools. It is supposed to be air conditioned, but the system does not always work properly. This creates problems, because there are no windows in the classrooms. The heating system, which is inconsistent, sometimes detracts from an otherwise inviting climate.

Tommy's Master's Degree from Glendale University was in the School of Letters, a department that concentrated on literary criticism. All additional graduate credits were in comparative literature, which is a study of the theory and practice of comparing literature analysis. His teaching endorsement is secondary education, grades 7-12.

Tommy has taught 19 years in America, 13 of which were in his own classroom. He presently teaches 9th grade English and 12th grade Advanced Placement English, which includes the study of poetry, literature and various forms of writing. As a Chinese Ambassador, he taught a Comparative Chinese Literature class for the language arts

department, a unit on China for the social studies teachers, and demonstrated the art of self-defense in physical education. He also spent 12 weeks in the six junior high schools in the district, introducing a unit on China that was continued by the teacher at the end of his 2-week stay. During this time he covered a variety of topics, including language, customs, and Chinese history. Working with various teachers and age groups throughout the district were highlights that Tommy fondly remembers. "I get to know all the seventh graders. There are many of these kids who end up in my classes in the future, and they still remember the things I taught them."

Before his tenure in the United States, he accrued 3 1/2 years of experience teaching 11th and 12th graders in Hong Kong. He cannot sympathize with teachers who express dissatisfaction with large classes. "People here complain about having too many kids in the classroom. I was educated, and I taught in classrooms with 45, 50 kids. No one complains over there."

There was no compulsory education in China when Tommy was growing up. All the public schools were government owned, and only those who could afford tuition were allowed to attend. Wealthy people often sent their children to private schools, with more modern facilities and better trained teachers. Because Tommy recognized the privilege it was for him to attend school, he developed a deep respect for education and hunger for learning, which was never fully satisfied.

This desire to become enlightened led him to America, where he found the educational freedom of choice for which he yearned.

In most people's cases who end up in America most likely because they wanted to further their education. A place like China or Hong Kong, the education system is quite different in which I think the major emphasis is place on memorization of the facts and the passing of State Exam so you can get your degree. I like to express my own opinion. I like to be more creative, and so I figured that coming to America [for post-graduate study] would be a better choice for me.

Tommy has never taken his educational opportunities for granted nor lacked appreciation for the process that enabled him to study in America. His gratitude is expressed through distinguished teaching and community service.

That's one thing I wrote to the immigration when my paper was in trouble on my status in America, staying. I saying that I want to stay in this country because I believe I have something to offer, and I was thankful to America for giving me the opportunity to study here. I earned my degree here, and I would like to give back to this country what this country has offered. And my way to paying back is to be a good teacher.

Tommy's family was very large. Although he had 18 brothers and sisters and two step-brothers from his father's first marriage, he knew only seven. The others left home years before he was born or died at birth. Today his family is scattered all over the world. An older sister, who was a kindergarten teacher until she retired, lives in Taiwan with her husband, a former Air Force pilot for the Nationalist Army. An older brother and two sisters still remain in Hong Kong, where they are able to keep close watch over their mother, who is nearly 90. A younger brother makes his home in Toronto, Canada, and a younger sister lives in Seattle, Washington. Because of the wide diversity of locales, Tommy does not see his family very

often. He does try to return to Hong Kong at least every two years to help his mother as she becomes more frail and incapacitated.

Tommy's father had a basic education and received training that would be helpful in business. In most cases, Chinese women were not educated while Tommy was growing up, but his mother was one of the few exceptions. She was very good in math and managed one of the banks her husband owned before the Communists took over the country.

With the Communist takeover in 1949, Mr. Chung was forced into political exile. He would have been one of the first shot because he was considered a landlord, and his daughter was married to a Nationalist. He fled to Jamaica when Tommy was five, and even though he corresponded with his wife until his death, the family never saw him again. The Communists took over their businesses and everything they owned, sentencing Tommy's mother to five years of hard labor in the village. A brother, who was in Teacher's College, was denied the right to continue his education because of his family background. "When you have a chance to go to school, you want take advantage of . . . of the opportunity, and you don't want to waste it or give it up."

While his mother was gone, Tommy and his three year-old sibling were raised by their 12-year-old sister. They lived on plain rice, soy sauce, and vegetables and ate only one meal a day, which was made possible from the small sum of money sent to them by their father each month. Tommy's experiences lend a perspective on intrinsic motivation and the role that students must assume in their own learning.

I was basically brought up by my own sister rather than by parents. And that make me realize how difficult sometimes may be and will be for some kids who claim that they're from, you know, a single parent, a single parent family and this and that. But I do not see that as a disadvantage. On the other hand, it made me realize it is still very much up to the individual. You can still make it possible for yourself to succeed.

Tommy met his wife on a visit home through a meeting that his sister arranged. They were married, and Aida left her family and Chinese culture to join Tommy in the Midwest. She obtained a job working for the school district as a secretary in the personnel office. Today they have two daughters, ages 6 and 10, who are very comfortable with their Asian ancestry and American roots. The girls are bilingual and can read and write Chinese, which is the primary language spoken in the home. Tommy also rents Chinese movies to aid their language development. He is pleased that his children are enthusiastic learners and thankful that they do not have to endure some of the frustrations that he knew as a child.

Tommy's eagerness to learn was put to a severe test when his family moved to Hong Kong. Although he had been a distinguished student in Mainland China, the next four years of schooling were the most difficult and humiliating of his life.

When my family moved to Hong Kong, I was place in a fifth grade class because of my age. I was 11 years old. It was a very difficult time for me. Hong Kong is a bilingual city, but in Mainland China English is not taught until you are a senior or junior in high school. So as a fifth grader in Mainland China, I never had any training in English, and it creates the biggest problem for me because I couldn't even tell the alphabets apart. They all sound alike to me.

I had every excuse to just not do anything. Five years from fifth grade through ninth grade, I failed every subject in English until I finally passed them all. And all because of two things. One is

I never gave up; and the other thing is I had a Bible teacher in high school. This teacher saw me around and just playing ball [during lunch hour] and he said to me, he said, "According to your transcript, you certainly could use some help in English. I would teach you how to read, write, and converse in English and you can do the same for me in Chinese." And so we used the Bible for a text. And so after spending all my lunch hour like that for three years, so by the time I was a ninth grader, second trimester, I was able to pass all my courses in English. I came first with the entire class of 300-plus kids, with you know, all my subjects passed for the first time. And then it opened up my thirst and my desire of learning English.

Tommy's persistence paid off when he made plans to continue his education at the University of Hong Kong. The once-dreaded study of English was soon to become a passion that would be sustained over the course of his life.

I did so well in my English classes that finally when I finished high school, I applied to the University of Hong Kong, and I took an exemption exam. I passed four years of requirements. I no longer need to take any English classes. So even though I minored in English, that would leave me so many free hours; I was able to invest my time in learning three foreign languages.

Whenever I travel, the biggest sum of money that I spend is on books. I like to collect books. I buy all kinds of books that I could read later for reference or for enjoyment. And it's always bilingual. I have half my books in Chinese and the other half in English. —

Tommy's strong sense of mission has been part of him since childhood, when the spark for learning first ignited. He works hard to ensure that lessons are taught at the correct level of difficulty to ensure success for all his students. He also remembers the ineffective teachers who tried to stifle his curiosity or crush his spirit and vows to never extinguish the enthusiasm that his students have for learning.

Even when I was in grade school, I always had the dream, the desire of becoming a teacher. And one of the first things that I

would like to do as a teacher is to teach my students the things I want to learn but I never had the chance to learn. So whenever . . . what my teachers did to me that I didn't like, I want to make sure that I wouldn't do that to my students.

Because Tommy is Asian American and represents another cultural perspective, he draws upon his personal background often as a resource for his lessons. It is not uncommon for him to discuss Chinese customs, educational practices, or literature whenever the opportunity arises, because he believes multi-cultural awareness is essential as the world becomes an international community. Lessons are not just taught in school, however. They often occur outside of the classroom setting.

I often invite the students who earn A's in my class to come to my house if they are seniors. Over the years I have bought . . . I have taken students and teachers to Chinatown Chicago to spend Chinese New Year over there, and we have Chinese dinners and so forth. I must have a thousand kids who've been to my . . . my house for, you know, celebration of this nature. These are the kids who is always remember, "I still remember how to use chopsticks because you taught us how."

Tommy's contributions to the teaching profession have been recognized and supported by students, administrators, parents, and colleagues.

I was nominated one time for a Teacher of the Year thing by the students. And I think the greatest rewards that I would consider more relevant in this case then were comments made by teachers and then I should say parents and the students who graduate in the past.

Although he did not win the award, it was satisfying to know that students appreciated his professional commitment. "Every life you touch, they take along with them a little bit of you."

Despite years of experience, personal and professional growth are very important to Tommy, who continually seeks new ways to teach familiar content.

I believe that even if you use the same material, same books, it does not always mean that you have to use the same notes or the same quizzes that you use all the time. My wife often complained about this. "You been teaching this book for 20 years. How can you still have to write new questions? You know, can't you use the same ones you used before?" I said, "If I do that, it will be no fun for me."

He enjoys the challenge of teaching the full-spectrum of students in grades 9-12. The diversity of ability levels enables him to extend himself professionally as lessons are planned which will nourish student growth.

My ideal schedule would be classes made up of all four grades and comprising of all three levels, meaning top level, average, and below level, 'cause that way I would have a better understanding of the complexion of the entire school and have students learning in different levels.

Several role models have influenced Tommy's teaching philosophy and attitude toward learning. Negative people also taught valuable lessons that contributed to the manner in which he approaches student motivation. Everything, Tommy believes, can be a learning opportunity, if we but open up our minds. Confucius wrote, "The greatest pain of being human is that we all like to be someone's teacher." Tommy admires the writing of this Oriental philosopher and notes the influence Confucius has had on his life. He is the Master from whom Tommy seeks wisdom and inspiration--the great teacher and role model who has lifted the veil of darkness from his mind. Tommy encourages students to examine the mysteries of life through every

lesson that he teaches so that they might come to know and understand that which is eternal and relevant.

I consider myself a "no-nonsense" teacher. I don't wanna tolerate anything that has nothing to do with what would help them learn, and to me learning does not necessarily only mean books, terms, poetry, or anything. In every lesson must also involve a statement that deal with life itself, because those are things probably last longer than a story from Shakespeare or a poem by Robert Frost.

Will Tommy sustain his commitment to teaching? His longevity in the classroom appears certain. For it is in teaching others that Tommy finds self-actualization and fulfillment of his destiny. "We all have something to share, and we all like to enlighten other people of what we know. And once you have that desire, that means the teacher is in you."

Laura Ashley

Laura Ashley, 55, became a middle level teacher out of desperation. She had never intended to leave her elementary students but did so after 14 years to escape the heartache of a failed marriage. Her husband was a teacher in the same building and seeing him every day was unbearable after a divorce shattered their 23-year marriage. When a position became available within the district at the middle school, Laura requested a transfer. She was promptly reassigned to teach the following year at Washington Middle School, a suburban school in the Midwest, where she has been on staff for 11 years. Laura reflects on the chain of events that changed her career focus and her professional commitment.

I enjoy middle level much more than I did elementary. At the time I thought there was nothing like elementary, but I do enjoy the

middle level. I don't know that it's . . . know exactly why. I think it's because the kids are more . . . they are able to converse with you . . . to interact with them better. They get your jokes.

Laura met her first husband in college in 1954. They became acquainted through activities of the brother/sister societies to which they belonged. These organizations were like fraternities and sororities in the 1950s and provided social opportunities for members. Laura and Ted dated on and off throughout the 4 years they were in school. Both wanted to become elementary teachers and seemed to have compatible ideas about personal and professional goals, so the summer after graduation, in 1958, they were married.

Laura taught fourth grade at Elm Creek Elementary School for 1 year before she became pregnant with her first child. After her son Tim was born, the family relocated to Pleasant Valley, a suburban community of 16,000 people in a Midwestern state. Laura quit teaching for 8 years to raise Tim and her daughter Susan, who was born 2 years later. Although she did some substitute teaching during her hiatus, she did not return to the classroom full time until both children were in school. In 1968 she accepted a teaching position at the same elementary school in which her husband taught. Although Laura and Ted were both happy to become professional colleagues, neither could foresee that one day in the future this close proximity would become unbearable.

Both of Laura's children graduated from college. Susan, who is now 30, received a degree in marketing, and Tim, 32, majored in

business and Spanish. Laura was disappointed but not surprised that neither child chose a career in education.

They always said they knew . . . they weren't sure what they wanted to do with their lives, but they knew they definitely did not want to be teachers, because they saw . . . I think they saw what we went through . . . you know . . . some of the stresses and so forth, plus they saw how some kids treated teachers with disrespect. And I think they just felt that that was something they didn't want to go through.

Eight years ago Laura remarried. She now has four step-children, none of whom are teachers. Her husband Phil owns a real estate company, sharing with his wife a love of travel, quiet summer evenings by the lake, and fishing. Laura's ex-husband, now a superintendent of schools, is gone from her life, but the painful trauma of divorce still lingers in her memory.

Laura was raised in a traditional family setting. Her father worked in a lumber business until his death in 1985. Her mother never worked outside the home during their marriage, choosing instead to be a full-time parent to the children. Both parents encouraged the two girls to go to college, and Laura recalls the options that were available to women in the 1950s: One could be a nurse, a secretary, or a teacher. Laura's desire to become a teacher was not based on career limitations, however, but on an intrinsic sense of mission that was recognized during early childhood.

I just knew from the time I was in . . . you know . . . grade school, that I wanted to be a teacher. I felt it from the time I was in kindergarten, and maybe even before then. I was always playing school. I liked school, and I also liked my teachers, and I thought when I saw them helping me and others, I just felt that I wanted to be able to do the same thing.

Laura's sister Emily became a home economics teacher and taught for 5 years, before quitting to raise her own family. She had three children, one who also chose to become a teacher like her mom and Aunt Laura.

Washington Middle School has gone through several transitions since Laura and her family moved into the district. Twelve years ago it was a junior high school which included grades 7-9. When enrollment increased in the elementary school and decreased at the high school, the junior high became a middle school to accommodate students in grades 6-8. A year ago history repeated itself when a restructuring of grade levels brought the fifth graders into the middle school, replacing the eighth grade class that moved to the high school.

There are 600 students and 30 staff members at Washington Middle School, most from middle class socioeconomic backgrounds. Little diversity is reflected in the predominantly Caucasian population. The majority of students are bussed in, many from neighboring villages that border the city.

An 8 period class schedule, with each period lasting 42 minutes, is in place at Washington. All teachers have five classes and supervise a general studies class, which is similar to a homeroom. Two preparation periods are provided, one for personal preparation and another for team planning with other core subject area teachers. Laura, who is considered the reading specialist of the building, teaches three classes of reading to sixth and seventh graders.

Through a quirk in scheduling, this year she also teaches sixth grade American history and seventh grade geography.

Although the school building is 32 years old, the structure remains basically sound. Laura notes that the interior is less attractive than before financial constraints of recent years affected the janitorial staff, which was reduced as an economic measure. The classrooms and hallways are in need of fresh coats of paint, but teachers compensate with cheerful, colorful bulletin boards to create an invitational climate for learning.

Teacher desks are usable but very old. Student desks in many classrooms need replacement, but there is no money to accommodate capital outlay requests. Book shortages have also become a problem as depleted textbook allotments fail to provide the resources necessary for some content area instruction. Two staff positions were cut this year--the dean of students and the detention monitor. The office secretary was forced to absorb the extra duty of monitoring the detention, an added responsibility that was not well received. Rumors abound within the school that further staff cutbacks are pending. There is talk of not replacing the six teachers who may take early retirement at the end of the year. This would result in larger class sizes for the remaining staff, who already feel burdened from paperwork and new expectations that are mandated daily from the principal.

It is not a good time to be on staff at Washington Middle School, according to Laura. Staff morale is at an all time low, and there

appears to be little hope that things will improve in the near future. Two reasons were given for the negative school climate: budget constraints, which continue to affect the quality of teaching and teacher discontent with administrative leadership. It is not that the principal, Mrs. Evans, is disliked personally, Laura related; most staff perceive her as a basically good person.

If a teacher sends a student down and there's a, you know, a . . . a good reason to kick 'em outa class, she will listen to both sides, and she'll always support the teacher. If a parent calls, she's very supportive of the teacher.

But the principal's poor organizational skills, careless decision making, and unwillingness to utilize staff input cause teachers to feel frustrated, angry, and confused.

I've almost always taught reading. Mrs. Evans told me that I was the Reading Specialist in the building and she didn't know how she could get along without me. So last spring when they came out with the schedule, I was teaching all social studies. So between some of the staff . . . we got together and we sorta rearranged some things. And I ended up with three reading and only two social studies. Two other teachers did not want to teach the reading, and so they gave me theirs and they took the social studies. I've always felt that reading is so important, and Mrs. Evans has always said that it was, too. And this year instead of three of us teaching reading with two of the special ed teachers, that would mean five, there are now 17 people teaching reading.

This administrative decision angered staff members who were not reading specialists and caused an additional burden for Laura, who felt compelled to provide assistance for her colleagues.

She made this decision because it was easier for her to schedule it that way. And so, for instance, the other sixth grade team . . . one teacher has four math and a reading; four social studies and a reading; four English and a reading; and they've never, ever taught reading before . . . and a brand new series. So this fall I had to have meeting after meeting after meeting which I got no reimbursement for or anything else . . . which

doesn't matter . . . but on top of everything else, I had to try to help these people, you know, organize their new materials.

Last year when principal/staff relations were especially trying, the teachers drafted a letter of concern, signed by the entire staff, which outlined problems in the school that needed attention and resolution. The letter was intended to be seen only by Mrs. Evans, in the hope that better communication would result in a more positive school climate. Unbeknown to the staff, a copy of the letter was mailed to the superintendent, who immediately called Mrs. Evans in for a conference. After some discussion, she was invited to accept the position of Director of Social Services within the district and resign her position as principal. Mrs. Evans refused and stated that she had no plans to leave until she would be eligible for early retirement in five years. The low morale that existed previous to this incident only worsened, and Laura expects that things will not improve until Mrs. Evans is gone.

This is the 2nd year that staff have been assigned to teams, and there are mixed feelings about the instructional concept. Some teachers are not comfortable with thematic planning and prefer to work alone; others may not want the added responsibility of team leader, which entails more work without compensation. Laura enjoys the opportunity to share ideas with colleagues and believes the support system that develops is crucial to counteract the negative staff morale resulting from an unresponsive administrator.

If it weren't for the wonderful staff that we have . . . I'm proud of the teachers . . . really worse than it is. We . . . we keep each other up. We make each other laugh. You know, we just help

keep each other going. If it's somebody's birthday, we all bring birthday cards, and, you know, just . . . just anything to kind of cheer us up.

With all of the problems at Washington Middle School, how does Laura sustain her commitment to teaching?

I think just seeing those happy, smiling faces a lotta times picks me up. I've never thought of teaching as "just a job." I enjoy coming and teaching and being with all these wonderful people.

Laura recalls the positive feedback she has received from both parents and students over the years and the many acts of kindness that colleagues have shown her since she came to the Middle School.

Although there have been some days of frustration, she notes that "perfect" teaching days are much more the norm.

One perfect day . . . there are so many, I can't really think. Well, anytime that I come to school, and I open my door, go down and have coffee with the staff, and then come back and all the students are here . . . their bright, shining faces. They're ready to learn. I'm just glad I'm a teacher.

Ten years ago Laura was the first staff member to return to school for a Middle School Licensure. Since her college degree was in elementary education, she felt it was important that she receive training to enhance her effectiveness with middle level learners. "I decided if I was going to teach in the middle school . . . you know . . . I wanted to go on and get further information as far as working with this age child."

The knowledge that she gained from her coursework provided a heightened awareness of the special developmental needs of young adolescents. Her preparation enhanced her confidence and flexibility,

which contribute to her effectiveness with those students who are apathetic and generally unresponsive.

There's gotta be a way. I mean, you have to be able to motivate these kids in some way. If you can't do it this way, then you try this. If that doesn't work, then you try this. If you don't know how, you ask for help.

Her attendance at workshops, conferences, and seminars enables her to become familiar with exciting new educational concepts and instructional strategies. "Nowadays they come out with all these fresh, exciting, you know, new ways of teaching, and new ways of getting the kids to learn."

As Laura reflects back upon her teaching career that spans over 25 years, she pauses to credit her fourth grade teacher, who was a role model and mentor. A special thrill for Laura was having the opportunity to do her student teaching under the supervision of this admired educator.

My fourth grade teacher . . . she was a very big influence on me becoming a teacher, and after I went to college, I did my student teaching under her, which was really a thrill for me. If I did something she thought wasn't the correct way to do it, or if . . . if she could help me do it better, she would come right out and tell me. It was just her way with kids; how she treated them; how she spoke to them. She let me kind of do my own thing, and . . . and if she felt I needed help, she would step in. I know she always used to talk with her hands, and I . . . I can't keep my hands in my lap. That's one of the things I can remember about her, how she always talked with her hands. She taught me to erase the board going up and down rather than across, because when your back is to the kids, and you go back and forth, you kinda wiggle. So every time I go to erase the board, I think about her. I go up and down.

Despite Laura's passion for teaching, she admits that it is not as satisfying today as it once was--not because of the students, but because of the administration and low staff morale.

I think the kids are . . . they're terrific. They . . . you know, some people say the kids are so terrible nowadays. Well, I think they're better than they were say even 5, 6 years ago. I expect my students will behave. They know what I expect of them. And I think because they know what I expect of them, maybe they try harder.

Laura was honored by colleagues 2 years ago when chosen Middle Level Educator of the Year--a highlight of her teaching career. It saddens her to think of leaving the profession which she most likely will do in two years. Her husband will retire at that time and wants to spend winters in a warmer climate. Laura, reluctantly, will take early retirement to join him.

Laura left elementary teaching because of her first husband; she may leave the middle level because of her second. Although both husbands shaped her career, Laura's commitment to teaching comes from within and cannot be extinguished.

I wouldn't have thought of quitting. The only reason I, you know, quit for awhile was because I had the kids. I knew I wanted to come back. I will remember the kids: how they respected me, how even years later after I, you know, had them in class, I'll get cards from them; I might get a wedding invitation; I might get a picture of their child. I see them downtown; they give me a hug. Maybe that's not professional, but that's what I'll remember. Plus I know that I taught them . . . not everything they know, but I think I taught them to respect themselves, too, besides what I taught them in the classroom. I'm just glad I'm a teacher.

Maria O'Riley

Maria O'Riley, 33, paid her "dues" and proved her commitment to the profession long before she began her teaching career. After dreaming since childhood of having her own classroom, she was unable to find a teaching position for 5 years after obtaining her college degree. During the first 2 years of her search, Maria did substitute

teaching in several schools in the city, working with students in elementary, middle school, and senior high settings. Unable to live on what she earned, Maria reluctantly accepted a job in business, where she worked for 3 years as a secretary. Despite the detour her career had taken, Maria never abandoned her dream. "I think as early as I can remember . . . and I think I decided to be a teacher in maybe fourth grade . . . I never wanted to do anything else." Finally, after 5 years of persistent searching, Maria was in the right place at the right time. She was hired to teach Spanish and language arts for 1 year at Knox Junior High, an urban school in a Midwestern state. The students were from middle to upper-middle socioeconomic backgrounds, had few learning problems, and most came from two parent homes--a seemingly ideal clientele. Maria interviewed for a similar position at another junior high in the district and accepted the job to teach at Fairmont Junior High School the following year. At the time of our interview she was completing her 8th year in the district and was still enthralled about fulfilling her dream.

I subbed for two years after I graduated from St. Helena and obviously couldn't make ends meet on a sub's pay, so I was a secretary at a couple businesses in town for about 3 years before I found my teaching job. So I . . . I know the business world, and I know the teaching world, and I would never trade it. I just . . . I love my job.

Fairmont, which serves students in grades 6-8, fits the description of an inner-city school with its 24% minority population. Of the 550 students enrolled, the majority are from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, and 35% of them receive free or reduced lunch. Many of the students have special needs; 8% are on Ritalin or

other medication. At the opposite end of the spectrum about one fourth of the students come from upper-middle class socioeconomic backgrounds. Those with a middle class orientation compose the smallest group in school. Despite the problems inherent with such diversity, Maria finds the challenges exciting and enjoys teaching at Fairmont much more than she did at Knox. "I think any other school would be boring. You know, it's never a dull moment around here."

Why would someone prefer teaching in a school where racial incidents were common at one point in time and many of the students come from family backgrounds where education is not a priority? For Maria, the answer is simple. It is her mission to accept such a challenge.

I think my purpose is to try to make a difference in at least somebody's life. And that's why I think Fairmont is so special . . . in that there're so many needy kids. I'm touching 110 kids and more every day. I'm touching their lives.

Maria brings more than commitment and enthusiasm to her teaching; she perceives herself as a role model for many of her Hispanic students. Concerned about the high dropout rate of students of color, she works tirelessly to impress upon young adolescents and their parents the importance of an education. Sometimes the battle against apathy seems overwhelming. "I think I care more than the student cares. So when do you back off? And if it was up to me, I wouldn't back off at all, because I think these kids need to learn that somebody cares."

Maria recognizes the importance of including parents in the learning process and strives to develop a positive partnership between

home and school. She contacts parents often and sets up meetings to discuss student progress, attitude, and issues that need resolution. Because many of the students come from single parent homes, it is often difficult to coordinate work schedules to facilitate a conference during the school day. When there is no other way to obtain parental feedback, Maria makes house calls in the evening or meets in a neutral location such as a restaurant, where concerns can be shared over a cup of coffee. Her role as an educator extends often to the parents or guardians who may not regard education as a priority for their children.

When you hear from parents all the time, "Eh, you don't have to go to school," or "School isn't important," well, kids are gonna believe that. So I think we need to educate the parents, and I think that would make a difference.

Fairmont Middle School has a staff of 50 teachers, all but four who are Caucasian. Two counselors, a principal, and an assistant principal compose the leadership team. Five paraprofessionals assist teachers with clerical work and minor teaching responsibilities.

The school building is old. It was built in 1912 as a high school, then later became a junior high. In 1987, after a 15-year period of study, committee meetings, and deliberation, the junior high schools in the district made the transition to middle schools. Of the six middle schools in the district, Fairmont ranks about average in size. The smallest has a student population of 300; the largest has an enrollment of 1000. Maria considers their school of 550 students the perfect size.

There are four floors in the school. The cafeteria, art room, and teachers' lounge are on the first floor. The second floor houses classrooms and the technology department. The main office, a teachers' lounge, and classrooms are on the third floor. The fourth floor includes a small teachers' workroom and additional classrooms. The music rooms and media center are carpeted; ceiling fans, installed within the last year throughout the building, make teaching and learning easier during the warmer days and months.

Maria notes that, despite financial prudence, there are ample resources and instructional supplies available at Fairmont. The media center has an extensive collection of books, and staff requests for additions are always honored by the media specialist. Bilingual dictionaries are available in English/Spanish and English/French to accommodate students who speak English as a second language. Although this year there are only 12 ESL students, in recent years there have been 50 or more. Most of these, Maria noted, were Vietnamese; but with the more stringent monitoring of immigration laws, the numbers have decreased significantly.

Maria is committed to the middle school philosophy and believes that students benefit from the changes that have been implemented within the past 5 years. Discipline problems have decreased since the ninth graders were moved to the high school, and student morale seems more positive. Maria attributes this to the placement of students on teams, which enables each child to connect with a small number of teachers and peers within the larger context of the school. Her only

dismay is that the foreign language program was dropped when the ninth graders left the building.

I used to teach the foreign language, and I really do miss teaching Spanish. I really enjoyed that. But, if I look at the whole picture, and I don't worry so much about just me, I think probably middle school is more effective for these kids. We worry more about the whole child now, and working in teams allows us to get to know the students better and keep better track of them.

Previously, when Fairmont was a junior high school, the class periods were 50 minutes long; as a middle school, they were shortened to 39 minutes to accommodate an 8 period day. Maria finds the shortened periods frustrating but believes this decision was made in order to offer both core and exploratory courses. Her concern is how to find time to interact effectively with 30 students and meet individual needs when class time is so brief.

It is demanding, you know, when you figure you have 30 kids in each class, and you only have 39 minutes. And you have to try to talk to each of these kids, and . . . and at least touch their lives during that one period that you had them.

Maria teaches four writing classes and two reading classes to 110 seventh grade students on her team. Five team members teach the core areas of language arts, science, math, social studies, and personal development, which includes friendship units, alcohol/drug awareness, health/family life. The ESL teacher is a part-time member, since she works with teams at all three grade levels. Special education students belong to teams as do the special education teachers.

Although Maria strongly supports the team concept, she noted the difficulty when team members are switched from 1 year to the next.

The best thing about middle school is to have consistency among the team members, but it seems that for one reason or another that

just has not been the case for our team. I was on the eighth grade team for three years. This is my second year on the seventh grade team. And this year we got two new team members, so this is basically the first year we've been together. And even one of our teachers wasn't hired until November, I believe, so she didn't even start the year out with us.

Maria is the team leader, and this rotates every year to other members of the team. She has mixed feelings about assuming this responsibility for only 1 year and wonders how much can be accomplished with a constant change in leadership. Because of the extra work involved which includes attending meetings and dealing with additional paperwork, the principal felt it best to share the responsibility. Team leaders are not paid for their time but can count the hours in service and training towards Phase III money, which is given by the district. This accrued money can be spent on staff development activities, instructional supplies, or other educational resources.

Maria has 2 preparation periods a day. One provides opportunity to plan lessons, correct papers, and take care of personal teaching responsibilities. The second preparation will be eliminated next year, due to financial constraints. Although her team members would be willing to give up their personal preparation period for a short time to keep the team process intact, Maria does not see how teams can continue to be effective if a common planning time is not provided in the schedule. She credits the team process for reaching students who might otherwise slip through the cracks. "I think with the team concept, I think the kids feel they belong somewhere, you know, and to someone."

Maria's classroom is inviting. Creative bulletin boards entice curiosity and are reflective of the diverse student population. The heading "Spanish All-Stars" intrigues my interest. Upon closer examination, I find an assortment of baseball and football cards featuring Hispanic athletes, arranged in an eye-catching design. At the front of the room, alphabet cards utilize both English and Spanish words, learning tools for bilingual students. On top of a book shelf, Spanish pinatas are displayed, colorful artifacts poised in readiness of ethnic celebrations. A large banner heading denotes "Everyone Smiles in the Same Language." Posters around the room add flair and challenge: "Kids Who Read Succeed," and "Books Give Us Wings." The instructional climate is relaxed and invitational, which accounts for the number of students who approach Maria for clarification of a class assignment or the warmth of a personal interaction.

Maria has been married for ten years and has one child, a daughter who is seven. Her husband Jack works for a company that sells long distance to businesses. She and Jack attended the same urban high school in a Midwestern state. He was the "hood type" and she was the "cheerleader type" so they traveled in different circles and did not spend time together. When their paths crossed five years after high school graduation, they began dating, and Maria relates, "The rest is history."

Andrea, her daughter, is a first grader who attends elementary school in another district. She enjoys school and is a good student. That she loves to read and has an affinity for math excites Maria, who

believes that these two disciplines will prepare Andrea for a good career in the future.

Maria's family background is inspiring, a testimonial to the ideals of democracy and the American dream. She was born in Havana, Cuba, to wealthy, well-educated parents. Her father was a lawyer and Assistant Athletic Director of Cuba. When the Communists gained control of the government, he was invited to train athletes in the Soviet Union but chose instead to chaperon a basketball team to Costa Rica. Once out of the country, he went into political exile and never returned to his native land. By a prearranged plan, Mr. Gonzolos fled to Mexico, where he found a place to stay and awaited his family's arrival.

Upon the defection of Mr. Gonzolos, Mrs. Gonzolos filed for divorce on the grounds of abandonment. Six months later, after Maria's grandfather bribed influential officials, she and her mother were legally permitted to leave the country. They joined Mr. Gonzolos in Mexico City and remained there 1 year before moving to Miami, Florida "where every good Cuban goes."

While living in Miami for 2 years, Mr. Gonzolos was recruited to teach Spanish in a Midwestern state. He had to complete another Master's program and get a teaching certificate, which qualified him for a high school Spanish position in a large urban school in 1967. He remained there until his death in 1979.

Mrs. Gonzolos has worked on an assembly line for a large company the past 25 years. She eventually remarried and had a daughter, Katy,

who is now 11 and talks about becoming a teacher someday, to Maria's delight. Katy is like an older sister to Andrea, who also wants to carry on the family tradition of teaching, at least at this point in her life. That Maria has been a role model is without question.

Maria admires her parents for their courage and determination to give her a better way of life. To ensure that she would grow up in a free country, they gave up their affluent lifestyle, family, and friends. When they came to America they could not speak the language, they had no jobs, clothes, or money--just a burning desire to raise their child in a positive environment. Maria is not certain that she would have the courage to make the same sacrifices that her parents did and is grateful for the freedom that is her legacy.

Maria did not learn how to speak English until after she started school, which made initial experiences with formal education frustrating. She recalls that there were no ESL classes at that time, and the teacher did little to help develop her communication skills. Maria sees the value of providing special classes for ESL students and is happy that such a program is in place at Fairmont.

Although Maria's parents always dreamed of returning to Cuba, Mr. Gonzolos died before he was able to revisit his native land. Mrs. Gonzolos hopes to live there again one day with her new family and encourages Maria to relocate with her. While this holds some interest for Maria, she does not feel the same sense of urgency that her mother does. Although she is proud of her Hispanic heritage, Maria considers

herself an American, and this is her home. Her roots are deeply embedded in the Upper Midwest.

Maria's father was her role model, and she recalls the special joy it was to substitute teach for him on days that he was absent from school. Near the end of his life, when he was dying from cancer, Maria was able to step in and "fill his shoes." Respected by both students and colleagues, many visited him at home to share appreciation for the way he touched their lives. Maria reflects solemnly on the way her father influenced the educational choices that she made and wonders what her destiny might have been if she had been raised by a lawyer in Cuba rather than by a teacher in America.

Maria is currently enrolled in a Master's program and should be finished within the year. She would like to receive more training in working with minorities and learn how to deal more effectively with gender issues when she is through with school. Her desire to grow continually drives her to new goals that will enhance her effectiveness as a teacher. "I think it's always important to keep an open mind and to be informed of the new things that are out there that are working for kids. We can never know too much."

A supportive administrator and peer group reinforce Maria's strong, driving sense of mission. Her commitment to teaching is unwavering. That she was listed in Who's Who in American Education in 1992 for her contributions to the teaching profession is noteworthy. Her father would be proud.

CHAPTER IV

SYNTHESIS OF DATA

Introduction

To ascertain the sustaining and impinging factors on teaching satisfaction as perceived by these effective middle level teachers, data obtained during career history interviews were analyzed to determine pervasive themes. Within the context of the research questions, four themes and related thematic topics were identified. These were presented and examined in this chapter. Areas that concur or differ from the research literature were noted. To ensure that confidentiality was maintained, all teacher responses were listed anonymously.

Commitment

Four topics emerged that were critical components in sustaining commitment to the teaching profession.

Strong Sense of Mission

Why do people choose to become teachers? Although the reasons may vary across time and circumstances, many teachers enter the profession because they want to help students learn. In a study of 85 teachers conducted by McLaughlin and colleagues (1986), most reported they had always wanted to teach. A strong sense of mission underlied their professional commitment. Other research studies indicate that teachers often have a strong desire to serve people and make a difference in their lives (Schwab et al., 1986). The thing that makes teaching meaningful and worthwhile for many educators is watching

students learn and "working with their wonder" (McLaughlin et al., 1986, p. 420). The 12 participants in this study all have a strong sense of mission which has sustained their commitment to teaching. Several teachers believe that, through inspiring students to become responsible citizens, their teaching efforts will impact society and make a difference in the world.

I keep lookin' at the young students, young people.
I keep seein' tomorrow. I keep seein' the future.

It may sound trite, but it's, you know, the ideology that you can save the world, and you certainly have to see that you have an impact on the lives of the students.

I'm touching a bunch of young people in the respect of hopefully helping them mold themselves into outstanding citizens. Hopefully make them a little bit more knowledgeable about the things around them.

I realize that I'm the person that makes the difference. You feel an efficacy, that you have changed the society. Or in some cases you haven't for some students, but you tried.

A number of teachers consider their mission a calling, a part of God's plan. Their contributions to education are perceived as essential and purposeful in the larger context of life.

I think what I do is important and is meaningful and that it has a purpose in the larger scheme of things.

I knew it was my destiny to become a teacher.

I think my purpose is to try to make a difference in at least somebody's life. And that's why I think this school is so special . . . there's so many needy kids.

I think it's my God-given ability to teach and that's my lot in life. I need to do that because somebody has to do it. And so I see it almost as a . . . as a blessing.

The desire to share knowledge with others through teaching developed early in childhood for some participants in this study.

I just knew from the time I was in . . . you know, grade school, that I wanted to be a teacher.

We all have something to share, and we all like to enlighten other people of what we know. And once you have that desire, that means the teacher is in you.

According to a research study by Farber (1984), the data strongly suggests that, while teachers are strongly committed to their students, they are not committed to the profession. "Teaching per se is apparently gratifying, but the profession itself is not" (Farber, 1984, p. 329). Schwab and associates (1986) note that teachers who are committed to the profession have high expectations that their efforts will make a difference to those they serve, which may lead to changes that will improve society. When this does not occur, some teachers perceive they have failed and blame themselves. "Historically teachers have been motivated by the desire to serve" (Roark & Davis, 1981, p. 40). When obstacles make it difficult for teachers to carry out their mission, morale declines and job satisfaction is threatened. It is important that obstacles that prevent teachers from developing a sense of professional efficacy be removed so that commitment to teaching can be sustained.

Relationship with Students

The most critical element of job satisfaction, according to many researchers, is the relationship between teachers and students (Alley, 1980; Blase, 1982; Conley et al., 1989; Farber, 1982, 1984; Feitler & Tokar, 1985; Fielding & Gall, 1982; Strahan & Van Hoose, 1988). The primary rewards received from working with students--having opportunities to meet instructional and affective needs--are highly

valued and correlate with increases in teacher satisfaction, effort, involvement, and motivation (Blase, 1982).

When junior high kids walk in your classroom, you know who sat on their lunch or their sandwich on their way to school on the bus. You know which lockers in your hallway are jammed. You know exactly what crazy excuse they have for or against whatever's happening in class. They are just very open. And see, I want more opportunities to interact with students.

I called on him the minute that hand was up, because it's hardly ever up. And he shared with the class, and he shares maybe once every 2 weeks, if that. And usually he's just sitting there, angry, but today we connected.

I remember a girl in my class that I read a book to the whole class, and she just . . . it was just like, oh, that was the best thing that had ever happened to her. And she wanted to buy the book, and it was out of print; couldn't find it. And I found it in a . . . accidentally ran across it in a bookstore and bought it for her for . . . for a gift. And she was so delighted. I hope she still likes that book.

Many teachers recognize that they have opportunities to model positive attitudes and behavioral choices for their students, and they use their influence to promote responsible decision making.

I think little pep talks here and there usually help, and just telling the child, "I know you can do better than this" usually gets 'em around. I guess if . . . if I believe in the student, then sometimes they start thinking, "Well, if . . . if she thinks I can, well, then I guess maybe I can."

I do become more personally involved with some of my athletes. As a coach you definitely take a real good look at personal life and try to help out. A lot of athletes come to their coaches as a father image.

I just need to . . . to stay as positive as possible for me to try to off-set some of the negativity that they may receive in their personal lives. They need to come somewhere and find somebody positive in their lives.

Job satisfaction increases when teachers receive positive feedback from their students. Often a small act of kindness will enable teachers to get through a difficult day.

I notice that when I'm sick, the kids are better. They know I'm sick. I don't even have to tell them. They're better. They'll . . . they'll stay back. They'll be quieter. They won't push things as much as they could. There are some, on the other hand, that do as much as they could. There's always a few, and they're always just waiting for that moment. But . . . but on the whole, children are very kind.

Low satisfaction results when teachers perceive themselves ineffective with students, when their efforts do not lead to the desired outcomes (Blase, 1982; Campbell & Williamson, 1989; Dedrick & Raschke, 1990; Huston, 1989; Leslie, 1989; McLaughlin et al., 1986; Strahan & Van Hoose, 1988).

There have been a couple of times when I can tell that this kid just really doesn't wanna . . . could care less about what I'm saying, or what I am trying to teach them, or maybe give me a sort of a feeling that, you know, "I don't have to do this. I don't like to do this type of thing." And I'll pull them aside, and I'll just try to explain, you know, why it's an important . . . and you know, I'm sorry if they don't like the way I'm doing something or if they don't like me, but I use the line that I'm not running a popularity contest, you know, and I . . . and then they kinda laugh at that. And sometimes they . . . I'd say the majority of the time, they will come around.

Routine disciplinary actions sometimes have a racial backlash, a minority teacher notes. Although consistency is shown when dealing with student misbehavior, some students try to "play" the system by blaming teacher prejudice for their problems.

One of the saddest things, that I do have students who sometimes when they get in trouble, White students, they use that even . . . and I found out when I was at the high school . . . they even use that as a means of playing their parents with the school or the teachers. They make it a racial issue.

Two teachers note stressful situations that hinder job satisfaction. They emphasize the importance of stress management before energy needed for effective teaching is depleted.

If I have a bad day in teaching, most likely it's I allowed the students get to me. I did not manage to, to channel my . . . my stress in the right way. It happens . . . once in a long while, but it doesn't hap . . . I'm really glad it doesn't happen all the time.

Teaching is extremely stressful. Waves and waves of students coming, hour after hour. Never stops. You really have no control on . . . on yourself during the day, 'cause they're there. There are no office hours as such to . . . where you can meet with students to help them, and so you gotta do it all there with all those kids at one time. You get one chance and then you do it. It's in crowded surroundings. It takes more and more energy for myself to stay with them, to . . . to keep them occupied in my direction. The energy's there, it's just channeling it, of course.

For some teachers, perceived role ambiguity makes teaching difficult on occasion, when societal issues are carried over into the classroom.

A girl I had in group one year, and the group setting didn't amount to much, but the next year she really sought . . . she needed a lot of attention . . . probably more, definitely more than I could give her. We kind of kept it up for two years, and so that was an on-going frustrating relationship in a lot of ways, because again, she needed more and was making some decisions that were probably not to her better . . . they were not real good decisions and trying to work through that kind of struggling between "What's my role?" and "I'm not the parent."

Confrontations with students diminish feelings of job satisfaction for teachers in this study. Despite the infrequent occurrence of negative interactions, effective middle level teachers are disheartened when positive relationships with students are interrupted.

Yesterday I had a . . . a confrontation with a student. That, you know, never makes me happy. That probably upsets me more than it does the student.

The student was totally out of control, and I thought it was me, and then he was placed in self-containment. And I can tell you his name now, and I can tell you the little stuff, but I didn't really have him long enough to really get to know him. But it was a hard thing for me because I nev . . . didn't feel like I'd ever had a situation without resolve before, because even though you have conflicts with students, you feel like you bring 'em to closure and that there's an understanding, 'cause you always get a heart-tug when a kid stomps out of the room for whatever reason or slams a notebook down or that kind of thing.

I have two children that I have sent to the office this semester, and I haven't sent anyone to the office in 11 years. So it upsets me when one or two students spoil it for everyone else, including me.

So often you have those people that you have a hard time getting along with, and you look at them and they're so much like you. There's a person here, and I like the kid personally . . . can't help but like him, but if he doesn't remind me of me a lot of ways when I was in the eighth grade. Very boisterous, very outspoken and it gets to the point where he's good for a few days and then he drives me nuts again, so I visit with him and say, you know, "Come on, listen, you're a smart enough person to know you don't need to be doing this kind of stuff."

Several teachers note that a bad day is one in which students do not accept responsibility for their own learning, which has undesirable consequences.

I have bad days. I think everybody has a bad day. School-wide, education-wide, a bad day is when I see kids that are so bright and have so much going for them that waste it. Like, right now it's midterm time, so I'm . . . I'm making out failure notices. And bottom line, kids aren't turning in their work are failing. And, to me, there isn't an excuse for not meeting deadlines. If you tell me, "I don't understand this concept," or maybe the child's IQ is not the highest in the class, and he doesn't perform the highest on . . . on a test or whatever, I can understand that. I can deal with that. But not turning in an assignment, I can't deal with. I have a real hard time with that.

The teachers in this study all had days that were frustrating, but on the whole, they believe their relationships with students are positive and reaffirming to their sense of mission. Because they are able to establish such strong rapport with young adolescents, discipline is seldom a cause of concern. The occasional disruptive student is dealt with quickly, and resolution most often is achieved after a private talk about the issue at hand. Student apathy appears to be a greater challenge, particularly in the schools with a large minority population.

Nearly all of the teachers expressed concern about the social problems that children bring with them into the classroom. Areas once outside a teacher's sphere of responsibility, such as poverty, family stability, and student wellness are now major factors that influence teacher satisfaction toward student learning (Wiles & Bondi, 1986). The neediness of kids is perceived as stressful at times, when teacher and parental roles become blurred and overlapping. Although these educators recognized that schools cannot assume all parenting responsibilities, they were also cognizant that unmet primary needs affect student readiness to learn. This role ambiguity will continue to challenge teachers until the social problems in society are alleviated.

Supportive Administrator

Empowerment, which enables teachers to participate in the decision-making process, is an important factor in job satisfaction (Austin & Pilat, 1990; Capel, 1987; Conley et al., 1989; Dworkin et

al., 1990; Grady, 1989; Huston, 1989; Leslie, 1989; Matthews, 1990; Schwab & Iwanicki, 1982; Schwab et al., 1986). Shreeve and associates (1988) identified teacher-principal collaboration as one of five critical factors for maximizing teacher potential. Campbell and Williamson (1989), who did a research study with 173 secondary school principals, listed five areas in which principals believed they could reduce teacher stress to heighten job satisfaction:

1. Support teachers both publicly and privately.
2. Minimize classroom interruptions.
3. Give positive rather than general feedback.
4. Demonstrate a caring attitude.
5. Accept responsibility to help teachers improve.

Data obtained from the 12 teachers in this study support the research of Campbell and Williamson (1989), which denotes critical ways that principals affect job satisfaction of teachers.

He almost never says no to me. I've had a wonderful relationship as a department head and . . . and as not department head. He seldom says no.

I have not found anything that I could not get if I needed to. That's one thing that our principal is real big about. If we need something, you know she'll get it.

A principal who accepts responsibility for helping his staff improve makes a valuable contribution to those teachers who seek opportunities to grow. One teacher in this study credits a supportive administrator for the encouragement he provided while she was enrolled in an advanced degree program.

The administration is definitely a benefit to those teachers who see themselves as empowered. Those teachers who want everything

judged, valued, weighed, and measured for comparison or for an absolute, I think, have some difficulty here. For me it has been an outstanding situation, and having an excellent principal in my building is one of the reasons I was able to finish my doctoral degree.

Two teachers believe the support received from a caring principal during their difficult early years of teaching gave them the confidence needed to become effective educators.

If there was one person that influenced me in education, it's the principal that was here. And he had a time, especially those first couple of years I related to. He hung in there with me and instead of being real critical he was real supportive.

My first principal here was just a wonderful man to work for, always positive and gave me lots of . . . especially my first few years . . . lots of positive feedback, always supportive, no matter what. And you just always knew that you could count on him to support you and your decisions . . . a very fair person.

Teachers admire the ease with which their principals establish supportive relationships with staff members. Through well-developed interpersonal skills, these principals enable teachers to feel respected and valued, factors which contribute to a positive school climate.

I admire my first principal, the way he could handle people, his respect for you, the way he backed people. His faculty, until proven different, is never wrong.

Anybody could visit with my principal. If you'd come in there and you were all upset about something, he could calm you down. And he always, always made you feel like you were the most important person in the whole school district.

Teachers who do not have a supportive administrator find less satisfaction in their teaching when their efforts are not appreciated or acknowledged. Sometimes this lack of support will cause teachers to leave the profession in search of one that may be more rewarding.

For one teacher in this study, his career longevity seems certain since a new principal recognizes the expertise he has to offer.

Education has been more rewarding and more satisfying to me now than it was before. And primarily because I finally recognized that someone knows and supports what I'm doing, rather than fighting the battle alone. And I . . . I think by having this kinda support, it might as well . . . I could easily say that my principal has probably increased my . . . my years of service in education.

Principals who are supportive of staff and utilize the opportunities they have to reduce stress make a critical difference in helping teachers sustain their commitment to teaching.

Positive Feedback/Support System

Teachers who have positive peer relationships perceive their jobs to be more satisfying than those who lack a support system within the school (Cano, 1990; Fielding & Gall, 1982; Kirk & Walter, 1981; Reed, 1979; Schwab et al., 1986; Youngs, 1978). To avoid the sense of isolation and loneliness that many teachers experience (Cecil & Forman, 1990; Dworkin et al., 1990; Eisner, 1991; Grady, 1989; Hearn, 1971; Johnson, 1989; McLaughlin et al., 1986; Miller & Johnson, 1981), effective teachers nurture a sense of camaraderie with colleagues, which helps build a psychological sense of community critical to job satisfaction (Austin & Pilat, 1990; Gold, 1987a, 1989; Miller & Johnson, 1981; Needle et al., 1980; Schwab & Iwanicki, 1982; Schwab et al., 1986; Youngs, 1978).

Being selected Teacher of the Year was a fantastic thing because it is your peers. The guys that work beside you now how many years, they just decide, "Yes, he's doing a pretty good job. I think he deserves it." So that was a great thing.

Part of the great thing about middle school, that we work on teams, that usually if one of us is down, it's because of something that might've happened in the classroom, and we could talk to some of our teammates about that, and usually they can give us some insight or some pointers.

Parents provide positive feedback to the effective middle level teachers in this study at conferences, school events, and through letters or phone calls. They express appreciation for the teacher support and expertise that enable their child to have a positive learning experience. Years later a parent may request the same instructor for another sibling in the family, which, to the teacher, is a vote of confidence that is very satisfying.

After I speak to that Parent Advisory, two or three of them come up and say, "Oh, thank you so much for doing this," and "Thank you. I'm so glad my child had you."

They say, "I don't know what you do or how you do it, but please do the same thing with this kid. This one will be different than the other one."

They see you at a basketball game, they see you at a football game, they see you uptown. They felt comfortable, and they like what you did for them. I've had a lot of people come up to me, both parents and students, and tell me I've done a good job.

I get comments from parents. You get 'em at conferences mainly. All those people were coming up and praising you and thanking you for the job you're doing and . . . and inspiring their kid to care about education. So those are . . . are real nice to get.

Over the years some parents will even request that their younger ones be in your class or put in your class because they know that whatever goes on, they will be informed.

Some students maintain a relationship with favorite teachers through letters and phone calls years after they leave school.

Teachers recall the special pleasure of being acknowledged a role model by former students who choose a teaching career. Indirect

feedback is often provided when students share fond school memories with younger siblings of being in a teacher's classroom years ago.

Many students have followed the footsteps. I found out there were several students who . . . who started out in the science field, and they switched to education or switched to the study of comparative literature, and according to their parents, it's all because of me. And those are always things that make me feel happy.

Many of them will come in and say, "My sister or my brother had you, and they think it's great that I, you know, had you for a teacher, too." They say, "You're so nice." I guess the one I'm most proud of is that they think I'm fair.

There are a number of students that I keep in touch with from my . . . from my first teaching position, who have had an impact on keeping me in the classroom because of the positive reinforcement that they gave me.

Other people throughout the school district can provide positive feedback that is reinforcing to a teacher's mission.

I have a note that I saved from a school board president that I received several years ago and made me feel real good. It was a handwritten thank-you note for something I had done, and I really appreciated it.

A research study conducted by Huston (1989) revealed that job satisfaction increased as teachers perceived a greater sense of personal accomplishment in their work. Positive feedback from parents, colleagues, students, and others provides teachers with critical reinforcement that nourishes their sense of commitment.

Teacher Differences

Three attitudinal differences between effective middle level teachers and those who have burned out or who have left the profession were noted in the data.

Perceive Change/Challenge as Opportunity for Growth

Although many people in society may be averse to change, effective middle level teachers thrive from challenges which enable them to grow. Studies by Laminack and Long (1985) characterized effective teachers as those educators who were willing to experiment with new ideas and a variety of instructional strategies. Alley (1980), Weinberg (1990), and Youngs (1978) found teachers who experience job satisfaction need to have variety, positive change, and opportunities to continually grow as individuals. All 12 participants in this study note opportunities for change and challenge as critical components for their personal and professional renewal.

I think we get wiser as we get older. But I'm not a person that will do the same thing all the time. I'm not one to get comfortable with any particular program. I always like change, so I don't feel that just because I've been doing this for 12 years that I'm stagnant. I don't want to ever be that way. That's the time . . . that's when I'll retire.

Change is always exciting. I also know myself pretty well in that I like a continual challenge.

Being in education kind of sets . . . sets you up, gives you a paradigm for growth, which is very important to me. Teaching is a personal challenge. You cannot lose sight of that . . . that it has to have meaning to you, and you have to make it meaningful.

It's this fear, at least for me it is, it's the fear of not always being better or getting better. The fear of getting into a rut, the fear of not doing things differently; it scares me so it keeps me motivated.

For some teachers, professional growth is attained through activities that facilitate success for students in the classroom. Teachers challenge themselves to become more responsive to individual

needs to ensure that students develop confidence in their ability to learn.

There's gotta be a way. I mean, you have to be able to motivate these kids in some way. If you can't do it this way, then you try this. If that doesn't work, then you try this. If you don't know how, you ask for help.

I had a very, very wonderful student. Very bright and capable, and for me to teach a blind student in a regular mainstream class was a real challenge, and it was a joyful challenge; a fabulous experience for me.

I was on a committee, ya know. The committee didn't even last long. Didn't even last a month. It was a committee to study the problems that kids bring from home to school. I thought it would've been a great opportunity to find out what are some things we can do to keep kids from exploding.

My ideal schedule would be classes made up of all four grades and comprising of all three levels, meaning top level, average, and below average, 'cause that way I would have a better understanding of the complexion of the entire school and have students learning in different levels.

Some teachers become renewed through attendance at conferences or by taking courses that will help them improve their effectiveness as instructional leaders. Education itself is often an invigorating challenge that helps sustain enthusiasm for teaching.

You certainly don't burn out when you're constantly going to something and learning new material. Maybe in some of the disciplines you don't have that choice.

Just continue to try new things, to work at ways to involve all kids, just to experiment with new methods and obviously taking more classes and being exposed to it . . . watching other staff members, doing things like that. It has been helpful, and I think the more of that, the better.

Once I finish my Masters, I'm gonna keep going. I wanna get my counseling. I wanna get my administration endorsement. I don't know if I'll ever do anything with them because I really like teaching, and I like being in the classroom.

A change in environment can provide a refreshing challenge for some teachers who have been in one school building for a number of years. Opportunities to teach new courses and work with colleagues at different levels often re-energize those who are weary from boring routines.

I thought a change would be good after 32 years in one building. Of course, the negative portion of the move is leaving a lot of good friends and having to prepare two new subjects after 20-some years of teaching, which is good for me. It's refreshing working a lot of time, but I think it's been great.

Because there is a greater range of student diversity in classrooms today, teachers must have the knowledge and resources to accommodate differences in learning styles. Lesson plans must address learner diversity in social/emotional, physical, and intellectual areas. By encouraging and supporting opportunities for teachers to attain both intrinsic and extrinsic reinforcement through stimulating growth activities, "They will realize their aspirations as professional educators, which will enable them to bring forth the highest possible achievement from their students" (Shreeve et al., 1988, p. 193).

Positive Attitude/High Self-Esteem

Effective middle level teachers are confident about their ability to make a difference in the lives of their students. Weinberg (1990) believed a positive attitude is one of seven important factors that enhances job satisfaction. When teachers create an educational climate that is pleasant and productive for student learning to occur, self-esteem is nourished.

The feeling of accomplishment--that you make a difference.
Nothing more can be said about a teacher.

Teaching does wonders for my self-esteem. I notice . . . I . . .
by summer . . . by summer it's like, "What am I worth here?" You
know, after not . . . being away from teaching for three months,
I'm always ready to come back in the fall.

I know it's an attitude. Being a teacher keeps you young, being
with young people.

It has to be a bottom-line belief that what I'm doing is
worthwhile, is good, is important, and there are some successes in
there.

In a research study conducted by Laminack and Long (1985) on
effective teachers, the "best" teachers were remembered by preservice
teachers as loving, caring individuals with a positive attitude toward
learning. The enthusiasm characteristic of their personality was
noted as genuine, and this excitement for learning was transferred to
the students.

I'll do whatever I have to do, and you'll gain everything you need
from me.

I always say, "If you know the problem, you solve half the problem
already."

If you make a mistake and you learn from it, it's not a mistake.

There's always a light at the end of the tunnel. There's always
an opportunity for you to improve and become successful.

By improving effectiveness in the classroom through sound
instructional strategies, teachers should also experience greater job
satisfaction. In Farber's study on teacher stress and burnout (1982),
he found that experiences for teachers that contributed to high self-
esteem were those that "enabled them to feel competent, important, and

committed to the profession while interacting with students" (Farber, 1982, p. 5).

I don't have to make my niche anymore. The kids know where I stand. I don't have to go around trying to get a reputation. I'm well known enough around here.

I feel they trust me. I feel that a lotta times they will come and talk to me about things that . . . you know . . . they can't talk to someone else about.

According to Jackson and associates (1986), "Educational leaders need to nurture rather than stifle the growth of teachers so that they feel challenged, motivated, and capable of excellent performance" (p. 637) which will enhance their self-esteem.

Teaching as a Moral Enterprise

What a person brings to a situation is just as critical as what the situation brings out of (or puts into) him or her. And what a person brings are individual characteristics such as motivations, needs, values, self-esteem, emotional expressiveness and control, and personal style. These internal qualities determine how someone handles external sources of emotional stress and help explain why one person will experience burnout in a particular work setting while another will not. They are also implicated in an individual's original choice of a helping profession as a career (Maslach, 1982, p. 57).

Teaching is, for many educators, a stressful occupation. Those teachers who learn how to deal with stressors in their lives and in the work environment are most likely to maintain their effectiveness and sustain their commitment to the profession. Stressors are those things which are obstacles that impinge upon teacher effectiveness in achieving desired goals. Such variables as student apathy, disruptive students, infrequent attendance, paperwork, unsupportive parents, colleagues, and administrators all affect the quality of teaching and sense of job satisfaction (Blase, 1982).

Critical life passages, such as the middle years, can affect a teacher's commitment. Research studies conducted by Borthwick, Thornell, and Wilkinson (1982) revealed a correlation between age and professional commitment. Teachers 34-44 years old perceived themselves as less committed to teaching than either their younger (21-33) or older (45-65) counterparts.

Whereas some people equate the middle years with a "mid-life crisis," for many adults this is a time of self-reflection and re-examination of priorities and values. If the teaching profession is not perceived as rewarding and congruent with one's professional aspirations, dissatisfied teachers appear more likely at this stage of their careers to consider other options. Because this 10-year span has been earmarked as a critical period in career longevity, leaders in education must ensure that opportunities for growth and self-actualization are available within the profession to prevent the exodus of capable, caring teachers.

In support of Borthwick's research, Jim Nichols was one teacher who nearly left the profession in the middle of his teaching career. At age 35, he felt a strong desire for change and decided to pursue a new career outside of teaching. He referred to this period in his life as a "kind of mid-life crisis," when he re-examined his professional aspirations and decided he was not willing to "settle in" to teaching for the rest of his life. Circumstances intervened, which prevented him from acting upon his decision to leave the profession. Today, a year later, the fever that nearly aborted his teaching career

has passed, and he is once again enthusiastic about helping students learn.

A critical life passage found in this research study emerged from the data analysis of the three oldest teachers, ages 53-56. All of them are giving serious consideration to early retirement from the profession. None are unhappy with their present careers, noting that they have become more effective with accumulated experience. Each one has received public recognition within the past two years for outstanding teaching. One was the National Health Teacher of the Year, the other two were Middle Level Educator of the Year honorees from their schools.

The reasons shared for leaving the profession are varied. If Laura Ashley chooses to resign, she will be able to spend winters with her husband in Arizona. Otherwise, they will be forced to live apart for several months of the year. Although Laura does not want to quit teaching, she is unwilling to be separated from her spouse.

— Chuck Swanson has no definite plans upon retirement, other than to travel and become acquainted with relatives who live in Sweden. He talks of staying involved in education through substitute teaching or coaching. Because he has accepted a voluntary transfer to the high school this year after 32 years teaching in one building, there are many new challenges in his professional life, which he perceives as "refreshing." Since he has another year before he will be eligible for early retirement, it is possible that he may reconsider his decision to leave.

Pat Jones, the National Health Teacher of the Year, resigned her position several months after our interview because she is unwilling to work 10 hours a day any longer and desires a change. She has several job offers but has not made a final decision. All are part-time positions which utilize her teaching expertise and offer the flexibility that is priority for her at this stage of her life.

To accommodate the need for change and challenge that may occur when teachers have accumulated decades of successful experience, education must become flexible and responsive to teacher needs. Contracts that have more options should be available so that effective teachers can pursue new challenges or fulfill personal goals without leaving the profession.

Teachers who become unhappy with the profession over time and burn out or lose their commitment are often those who are the most dedicated in the beginning of their careers. They are the ones who are likely to work too long and too intensely, which could lead to weariness in mind and spirit. According to McLaughlin and associates (1986), the structure of American schools guarantees the failure of teachers. Whereas there are opportunities for effective teachers to achieve professional success, many of them also feel a sense of deep personal failure when they are unable to realize the aspirations which drew them to the profession. Although working with students is a primary source of job satisfaction, feeling unable to meet the diverse learning needs of these students can cause teachers to become disappointed in themselves, which may result in strong feelings of

failure. Working closely with some students, day after day, who are needy and demanding, can also diminish the strongest call to serve. Teachers must practice, according to Potter (1987), "a delicate balance of involvement and detachment" (p. 6) to sustain their commitment to teaching.

In studies conducted by Borthwick and associates (1982), income was not a significant factor in teacher burnout, although it may have been a cause for some to leave the profession. This research supports the theory of Herzberg and associates (1959) in which money is noted as a dissatisfier rather than satisfier. That is, income would not prevent teachers from entering the profession but could be a factor to make some leave. Those who remain in teaching appear to be intrinsically motivated so that income would not be a primary concern.

Whereas the effective middle level teachers in this study believe they would receive merit pay if it were implemented in their schools, only two subjects want to see this practice become a reality. The majority of teachers are concerned about the politics involved in identifying teachers who would receive the additional compensation. They also believe merit pay would lead to professional jealousy, unwillingness to share new ideas, and low staff morale. Although the concept of differentiated pay is applauded in theory, none of these 10 teachers perceive it as a practical alternative, even though they would appreciate financial recompense for their outstanding professional efforts.

The teachers who participated in this research study have a strong professional commitment and sense of mission. All believe their efforts make a difference in students' lives, which is a crucial component of job satisfaction. None of them consider money a primary concern, although a higher income would alleviate, for several of them, the necessity of working during the summer months to supplement their incomes.

The recompense for teachers would be my weakest area . . . my . . . my area of least concern in the profession.

Money is not a major factor for teaching. You can't buy happiness.

In this profession your reward is not gonna be your money. Your reward would be how much kids would benefit from what you have to offer.

It's not money, it's the appreciation.

Despite obstacles or events that may interrupt the teaching cycle, effective middle level teachers enjoy being in the classroom and do not allow outside forces to circumvent their effectiveness or commitment to young adolescents.

I know that by the end of summer, I am ready to go back to school. So why would I want to leave a profession that I enjoy?

Out of all the . . . the prejudice and out of all the . . . the obstacles that I was involved with, I didn't stop. I kept working. There was a goal that I had to accomplish.

I wouldn't have thought of quitting. The only reason I, you know, quit for awhile was because I had the kids. I knew I wanted to come back.

I haven't been sick a day in years, mostly because of this . . . I don't want to be gone.

I had the option to go to high school. I am a ninth grade teacher. And nobody . . . hardly anybody can believe that I chose

this when I had a chance to move up. And so I am obviously very committed to this age.

Teachers often assume social roles, in addition to that of instructional leader, in order to provide students with guidance and support that will enhance responsible decision making.

We do not only teach now, but we are sometimes counselors, sometimes father, sometimes a mother. We're not policemen, but we certainly try and guide people from right and wrong.

Although the effective middle level teachers in this study perceive that they are providing a good education for students, they recognize that there are ways for schools to become more responsive to student needs. "I think we could always do a better job. I think good is not good enough. I think we need to be the best."

Whereas some teachers enter the profession because they want to help students learn, there are diverse reasons why some choose to leave. To ensure that dedicated and effective teachers sustain their commitment, school settings should provide avenues through which teachers may accomplish their educational goals. Contract options that are responsive to the diversity of teachers' personal and professional needs seem likely to increase the probability of career longevity. "Unless one has fueled oneself with knowledge, rewards, and strength, the fires of compassion can be all consuming, leaving nothing but emotional ashes" (Maslach, 1982, p. 147).

Crucial Factors

Careers are shaped by crucial factors that occur throughout an individual's life. Six factors were noted among the participants in this study.

Mentor/Role Model

Many successful teachers, upon reflection of their effectiveness and professional accomplishments, credit mentors or role models for the positive contributions made during their educational journey. All 12 teachers in this study were inspired by someone who believed in their potential to become outstanding teachers: a principal, teacher, or parent. One teacher noted that he would have left teaching at the end of his difficult first year, had it not been for the principal, who became his mentor. This administrator worked closely with Jim Nichols, meeting with him daily to discuss problems and ways to resolve them. He visited the classroom and study hall often, to observe Jim's instructional strategies and classroom management procedures. The feedback provided was always positive, never critical of Jim's efforts or professional integrity, and the guidance continued until Jim's confidence was restored and he was able to make it on his own.

Many teachers in this study regarded elementary, secondary, or college teachers as significant people who influenced their decision to enter the profession. These educators were role models who were remembered for their love of teaching and learning, the positive relationships they were able to establish with students, and the instructional strategies that were utilized to make lessons enjoyable. Many teachers continued their relationships with role models into adulthood. One noted the joy it was for her to student teach under

the supervision of the elementary teacher who inspired in her a desire to teach when she was just a child so many years ago.

I had a fourth and fifth grade teacher who I admired. I just liked the way she was always fair and handled her students.

She was a very good language arts teacher. She was our resource teacher, and I would say she's probably someone that really drew out in me and encouraged me to try new things.

All you have to do to figure out how much teachers make a difference in your life is to look back in your life. I could name five or six teachers that I look back upon and I have a great deal of respect for that, not just academically, but just what you learn from their personalities and the things that have helped.

Maria's father was a teacher, and since childhood she knew her place was also in the classroom. Maria recalls stories told at the dinner table about interesting events that had happened at school, amusing anecdotes about students that made her father's laughter fill the room. That he enjoyed his work was evident, and Maria could think of no profession that would be more wonderful than teaching.

My dad was a teacher and I . . . I always remember, you know, running into his students at the mall or . . . or when we would go to different things at school and, you know, the kids telling me how much they enjoyed having him for a teacher and that sorta thing. And I always thought that was neat. He certainly loved his job, that's for sure.

Research shows that 40% of all new teachers leave the profession within the first 3 years (Farber, 1984). It is important that support systems be established in schools to provide inexperienced teachers with the guidance they need to facilitate a successful teaching experience. Administrators and veteran teachers who become mentors or role models are making an important contribution to the profession. Unless opportunities are provided for new teachers to learn from the

masters around them, the exodus from teaching of bright, capable teachers will continue; and students will surely be the losers.

Environment

Troy Johnson grew up in Watts, a housing development in central Los Angeles, in an environment so harsh and life-threatening that he knew as a child that one day he would leave. Because he was surrounded by poverty and despair, Troy determined while in grade school that education was the key to a better life. His elementary and secondary schooling were a preparation for college, which would take him out of the environment he hated and provide the training he needed to become a teacher.

Well, at an early age I realized that . . . you know . . . education was important, and it's a means of doing better, and in my case, of getting out. And I've always realized that, and I decided no matter what happens to me in my life in the course of getting an education, that could never be taken away from me.

Tommy Chung grew up in Mainland China and lived there until he was 11 years old. When the Communists took over the government, his father went into political exile and his mother was sentenced to 5 years of hard labor, working in the city. After completion of her sentence, the mother moved the family to Hong Kong, where Tommy continued his education. After graduation from high school and the University of Hong Kong, Tommy left his country to come to America, where he pursued post-graduate study and later made his home.

In most people's cases who end up in America most likely because they wanted to further their education. A place like China or Hong Kong, the education system is quite different in which I think the major emphasis is place on memorization of the facts and passing the State Exam so you can get your degree. I like to express my own opinion. I like to be more creative, and so I

figured that coming to America [for post-graduate study] would be a better choice for me.

Greg Clark grew up in a rural area where animals, birds, and trees were commonplace. His interest in science was developed at an early age because of the numerous opportunities to observe the marvels of nature unfold before his very eyes.

We lived out in the country and there weren't too many neighbors around. And I was the oldest. I think I was the oldest kid out in that area anyway. Being the oldest of 10 children, I would take long walks in the woods, and I was outside constantly. So I got appreciation for nature and that was natural history, 'cause I could see it from year to year. The same birds would come back to the same nests, and all those dynamics of science were going on in front of my eyes. Being an inquisitive child, I picked up on it. I went to a one-room school just a block away, so there was nature everywhere. If I'd a gone . . . lived in town . . . it might have been different.

Greg perceives his childhood environment as an outdoor science classroom, in which Mother Nature was the teacher. He ponders how his life might have been different if he had been raised in town, away from the enticement of his natural surroundings.

Maria O'Riley was born in Cuba to very wealthy parents. When she was three years old, her father went into political exile to avoid being killed in the Communist takeover. The family came to America to escape the political oppression and live in a free country. Mr. Gonzolos, once a distinguished Havana lawyer, went back to school to get his teaching degree and became a Spanish teacher in a Midwestern state.

Maria admired her father and considered him a role model throughout her life. If the family had remained in Cuba and Mr.

Gonzolos had continued his law practice, Maria might have chosen a career in law rather than one in teaching.

Obviously, I have to admire my parents for everything that they've gone through. You know, I was born in Cuba, and they had . . . they had everything going for them in Cuba. They had lotsa money. They had the education. They had the family. And they left it all, basically for me, so that I could grow up in a free country.

Whereas environment always has an impact on people's lives, it was a crucial factor in shaping the careers of these teachers in this study. Had they chosen to remain in their childhood environments, it is doubtful that they would be the teachers they are today.

Childhood History

All 12 teachers in this study came from intact families where the parents remained married throughout life. The majority were high school graduates; a few had eighth grade educations, and four had college degrees. The socioeconomic background was predominantly lower-middle class, although a few families were representative of middle class status. Because financial security was a concern for many of the parents, education was perceived as the way to a better life. Most teachers in this study recalled as young children their parents' expectations that they attend college. In some homes the topic of higher education was never discussed as an option--it was always assumed as part of the educational process.

School did not end at 12th grade. It was just absolutely assumed from day one that when you finished college, you were done with school. My folks did everything they could to help us. Unless there were two in college at the same time, we were given money for tuition and room and board and books, and anything like clothes and entertainment we had to get on our own. We weren't rich. We were very middle class, but to both of them education was very, very, important.

My dad, when he came from Sweden, he had an eighth grade education as an immigrant. Then when he got his citizenship papers, he couldn't talk a word of English. He went to night school to learn English and get his citizenship papers. He definitely wanted his boys to have a college education.

My earliest recollections of talking about school at home included parents who were very involved, always curious about what I was doing, very demanding, unwilling to hear any of my complaints, and always dwelling on the positive. My father served on the Board of Education of our school 21 years. And even now, when I'm 37 and the baby of the family, my parents rarely miss a basketball game at the high school. So they've always been involved with the school and education.

One teacher was inspired by his grandfather, who challenged him to become a lifelong learner. No matter how impressive the accomplishment, his grandfather continually urged him to expand his horizons and set new goals that would enable him to further his growth.

He used to always say, "Grandson, or Son, get above level." And every time I thought that I was above level, he would always say to me, "Get above level." He said it in high school. He said it after college. He's saying it . . . and he did say it after college, to continue to get above level. And you find out that "above level" is . . . it's . . . it's an on-going, continual thing.

Brian Erickson knew he wanted to be a teacher when he was a child, but his parents could not afford to send any of the eight children to college. Rather than abandon his dream Brian joined the military service after high school graduation so that he could continue his education through the GI Bill. "I had to do everything on my own." Although his parents never discussed college as an option because of their limited income, Brian found a way to accomplish his goal. The only college graduate in the family, he is grateful for the financial

assistance provided by the government which shaped his career and made his childhood dream a reality.

Pat Berry had a major health crisis during her youth that permanently changed her life and shaped her professional career. At 11 years old, she became stricken with polio and spent 4 months in the hospital. For part of her rehabilitation, she worked with physical therapists to strengthen her muscles before atrophy permanently took its toll. Pat became very good in physical activities that required flexibility and strength and excelled in athletics during high school, when her body was again healthy and strong. It was during this time that her interest in becoming a physical education teacher surfaced.

The whole time I was in the hospital there were only two things that we did besides sleep at night, and one of them was do therapy exercises, and the other was have our limbs wrapped in wet, hot towels. I got awfully good at flexibility and strength, because I had to do all this building up of the muscles that were going to wither away if I didn't. And I honestly think that that's probably why I started out being interested in phy ed . . . because I was so good.

Family Environment

Family members who are supportive and accepting of individual shortcomings and personal limitations provide a nurturing environment that is conducive to professional growth. Ten of the teachers in this study have such a family environment, where disappointments can be divided and celebrations shared. The spouses are confidantes and helpmates who provide a major source of support for their mates. Many teachers credit their marriage partner for making the necessary sacrifices so that a desired educational goal could be accomplished. Whether seeking an advanced degree, enrolling in college as an adult,

or making a job transition within the profession, these effective middle level teachers had the support and encouragement of their families to sustain them.

My wife would be my greatest professional asset, because she is very professional and has many great ideas. I consider her a model for myself with the ideas she has.

I went home and told my husband how rewarding it was to help these little kids, and he said, "Well, you should go to college." And I laughed and I said, "Forget it!" I'm . . . I am a very inhibited type person. I didn't like going into strange places and new things, and he kept after me and encouraged me to do it. I never would have, if it hadn't been for him.

My wife is a good moral support. Without her, my Master's Degree never would have happened.

Because the majority of teachers in the study prepare lessons or correct papers at home each night, which takes time away from family activities, the supportive spouse understands that a teaching job often extends beyond the school day. There are other activities that require additional time in the evening, such as attendance at professional meetings or chaperoning an athletic event. Mates who recognize that their spouses are driven by a strong sense of mission,—who perceive teaching not just as a job but as a moral enterprise, provide the support necessary for these effective teachers to accomplish their educational tasks and realize their dreams.

The family environment had a negative impact on one teacher in the study who was divorced from her husband eleven years ago. Although those days were tense and unhappy ones for Laura, the divorce became a crucial event in shaping her career.

Laura and her husband were elementary teachers in the same school; and although she thoroughly enjoyed working with young children, Laura decided to seek another teaching position in the district when she and her husband of 23 years got a divorce. When a position became available at the Middle School, she applied and was granted a transfer the following year. She did not expect to become so attached to middle level students but soon discovered this age group was much more fulfilling to teach than the younger learners, whom she had taught for 14 years. Today, 11 years after making the transition to middle school teacher, Laura has found her niche, and she would not choose to return to elementary teaching if it were an option. A traumatic, personal event in her life thus became a catalyst for a professional job change that has filled her life with joy and enriched the lives of many young adolescents.

Troy Johnson was separated from his wife at the time of the interviews but was hopeful of a reconciliation. Although his wife is also a teacher, she was unhappy with the hours Troy spent coaching after school, attending games in the evening, and working on his Master's Degree. Because they have two young daughters, his wife wanted Troy to spend more time with the family. His family is very important to him, and Troy is trying to work out an arrangement that will allow him to pursue his professional interests without undermining his marriage. He is confident that a compromise can be reached which will enable the marriage to continue.

That the family environment makes a difference to the effectiveness of teachers seems reasonably certain. Those teachers who are given the space they need to seek new opportunities for growth are confident, well-prepared educators who realize their value to the profession. By having a supportive haven in their personal lives, they are able to escape the harmful effects of stress, which are so debilitating to others around them. This positive family environment helps effective middle level teachers sustain their enthusiasm for teaching and commitment to the profession.

Identification with Student Diversity

Three minority teachers in this study are able to sustain powerful connections with students of color and others who perceive them as role models or cultural ambassadors. Two of them teach in inner-city schools, where the racial diversity is as high as 43%. African American, Hispanic American, and Asian American students reflect the ethnicity of the student population. The third teacher is housed in an urban high school that has a 10% minority clientele. Although these teachers are able to sustain positive relationships with all types of learners, they are especially effective in establishing a racial connection with those students who are often difficult to motivate.

Maria O'Riley, a Hispanic American teacher, is concerned about the high dropout rate among Hispanic students and other minorities and works hard to inspire those in her classes to make education a priority in their lives. Because she realizes the importance of

parental modeling, she tries to include parents and guardians in the learning process. Maria notes that many Hispanic adults are intimidated by school personnel and the formality of the building, and so she will arrange meetings outside of the educational setting whenever a parent seems reluctant to attend conferences at school. Adults who are uncomfortable speaking broken English are soon put at ease by Maria, who is bilingual, and speaks her native Spanish when it will facilitate more open communication.

Maria believes that Hispanic parents need to become cognizant of their responsibility in reinforcing the value of an education to their children. Too many, she notes, do not respect a high school diploma and do nothing to prevent their son or daughter from dropping out of school. Until an attitudinal change is forthcoming from within the family and there are jobs for those Hispanics and other students of color who do graduate from high school, Maria foresees that schools will continue to face difficult problems with student dropouts.

— Maria believes that other Hispanics perceive her as a role model, and she tries to strengthen the racial connection by emphasizing the concept of diversity within her classroom.

I can add a different perspective to our Hispanic students. I think they see me as someone that maybe is different from your normal American student who has succeeded in life and so I think, in that respect, some of them do look up to me.

Troy Johnsen, an African American, teaches in an inner-city intermediate school that has a 43% minority population. Despite the large student diversity, there are only two minority teachers on staff. Troy assumes, as part of his mission, responsibility for

educating both students and colleagues about contributions made to society by people of color who are often omitted from textbooks. Through heightened awareness of ethnic issues and positive role models, Troy hopes to instill in his students a sense of racial pride, which may become a catalyst for achievement in school.

Troy is disappointed that the majority of his colleagues do not deal with student diversity except on a superficial level. They do not familiarize themselves with the differences that exist among various cultural backgrounds but rely on him for information on fads, slang, or attitudes characteristic of Black students. Although he spends time on research to find interesting information to share with his classes, he knows of no other teacher who expends effort to ensure that students receive a balanced historical perspective.

For years I was the only Black elementary teacher in the district, so I feel kinda special in that I'm giving something to the community, I'm giving something to the kids, I'm giving them the experience that . . . it's going to give them a . . . a real look, or a different look, of the expectations.

Troy is a role model for many of his students. By sharing his personal background and struggles to rise above an environment of poverty and violence, he offers hope that they too can realize their goals and dreams, despite the obstacles that surround them. "I put kids in a situation where they see themselves in the mirror, and they can see themselves a few years from now and be thankful for the direction they were given."

Tommy Chung was hired as a Chinese Ambassador for a large urban school district in the Midwest upon completion of his Master's Degree

at Glendale University. His job entailed sharing information about Chinese culture with students and teachers throughout the district. Because of a sizable minority population divided among the various schools, the district administrators felt it was important to provide a global perspective for the diverse student population. Tommy Chung, an Asian American, had the right credentials and personal background to lend authenticity to the new program. The 7 years he served as Ambassador were very rewarding to Tommy, because he was able to spend all of his time sharing his rich heritage with students who were fascinated by his culture.

I was able to use that opportunity also share my culture with the kids, teaching them Chinese, sing Chinese songs and do martial arts for exercise in the morning rather than regular jumping jacks. And the kids enjoy me so much that many wrote me afterwards, and they invite me to go to their schools and talk to their schools and visit their family and so forth.

Although Tommy has not been an official Chinese Ambassador since 1979, he continues unofficially to dispel myths about his culture and promote racial understanding and respect within his classroom. One part of his mission as a teacher is to provide students with information to replace ignorance, which he believes is the cause of intolerance and discrimination.

Tommy is concerned about the discrimination that is directed against various ethnic groups and the violence that often occurs as a result of racial misunderstanding. He does not condone revenge as an answer for those who commit violent acts--knowledge is the key. Education, according to Tommy, will bring forth the acceptance and tolerance so necessary in today's global society.

I think every single thing that I have I turn it to my advantage as a means of education. So every holiday, Chinese holiday or festival and so forth, I go print off things for my kids, then they learn something, customs, and so forth, about China and then how it compares to the United States. And by doing so I think they will grow to understand other cultures more, and they will accept other culture much better.

Maria, Troy, and Tommy bring more to the middle level classroom than their expertise. They bring with them the breadth and sensitivity of a multi-cultural perspective that is not available in textbooks. By using their ethnicity as a tool to establish racial connections, they may become role models for students who need a positive adult to emulate. Through sharing of customs, values, and personal experience, students develop pride in themselves and gain confidence in their ability as learners.

The teaching careers of these three teachers were shaped not only by their unique family backgrounds but also by the color of their skin. The cultural diversity which they represent may be the greatest asset they bring to the teaching profession.

Pre-Teaching Experience

Three of the participants in this study had experiences before they became teachers that changed the direction of their careers. For two of them, the events had positive outcomes which led them to enter the teaching profession. Because one teacher had a negative student teaching experience, she nearly left the profession forever.

When Chuck Swanson attended college on an athletic scholarship, he intended to get a degree in business. He began taking courses in education to fulfill requirements for a minor but had no plans to

teach. Working with students in an athletic setting changed his mind and made him realize that he enjoyed helping kids learn. He was able to establish strong rapport with them, and the satisfaction he received from teaching them athletic skills was greater than he had ever anticipated. After a brief re-evaluation of his career plans, Chuck dropped the business major to pursue a teaching degree. He notes that he entered the teaching profession "through the back door" and considers the time spent coaching young people a "lucky accident" because it changed his professional destiny and led him to a career he has enjoyed for 33 years.

Cindy Schafer never planned to attend college or become a teacher. Because she grew up in a large family with parents who had a limited income, Cindy's dream was to get a job and earn enough money to buy some of the luxuries that she had been denied as a child. She married at age 19 and had children 2 years later. While they were young she continued to work in blue-collar jobs to supplement her husband's income.

It was when her children were in elementary school that Cindy became a parent volunteer, assisting teachers with clerical tasks, bulletin boards, and tutoring of students who had difficulty with reading. Through her tutoring experiences, Cindy discovered that she had a gift for teaching. Students responded to her suggestions and improved their reading skills under her guided supervision. The success was so fulfilling to Cindy that she shared her achievement with her husband, who immediately suggested that she enroll in college

and get a teaching degree. Although frightened at the thought of returning to school after being out of an educational environment for 10 years, Cindy's husband eventually convinced her to give it a try. The decision to become a teacher was one of the best things that ever happened to her, Cindy shared, and she credits her husband for instilling the confidence she needed to realize her dream.

Paula Wood's story has a different ending. She planned on becoming a teacher and was nearly finished with her educational preparation when an unexpected turn of events caused her to abandon her career plans. The student teaching experience she had waited for with such anticipation was so disastrous that Paula chose to leave the profession before she ever really began her teaching career. She accepted a social service job in a non-profit organization, where she remained for 4 years. Only after major changes were implemented in the organization did she reconsider her former plans to become a teacher. She applied for a teaching position, was hired, and soon discovered that the trauma of her student teaching days was behind her. Students responded to her warmth and positive demeanor, and efforts to inspire an interest in learning were successful. Gone were the doubts from the past which had undermined her self-confidence and commitment. The desire to teach that had been dormant for so long was finally renourished and reaffirmed. Today, 10 years later, Paula marvels at how close she came to abandoning the profession that is so much a part of her life and personal identity.

Commonalities

Based on a synthesis of the data, four commonalities emerged that are reflective of the life history patterns of the effective middle level teachers who participated in this study.

Mentor/Role Model

All of the teachers in this study had at least one person who was a mentor or role model at some point in their educational journey. Many noted several significant others who were instrumental in shaping their professional careers. Teachers were cited most frequently for their gifts of support and inspiration; nine cited them as role models or mentors. One woman identified her father, who was a teacher, and determined as a child that she would follow in his footsteps. Four people credited administrators for lending them support that was crucial for their professional sustenance.

Effective middle level teachers have a support network in their lives that nourishes, questions, and gently encourages them to grow. Because they recognize the critical difference one individual can make in another's life, these 12 teachers welcome opportunities to become role models for their students; for they realize, from their own experiences, that children learn best by example.

Childhood History

Growing up in a family that valued education had an impact on the effective middle level teachers in this study, who all are testimonials to lifelong learning. Incidents were recalled from childhood of a parent helping with a homework assignment, attending a

school event in which the child participated, or asking questions at the dinner table about a lesson learned in school. The parents of most of these teachers were supportive and encouraging in both scholastic and extracurricular endeavors. They attended PTA meetings, served on the Board of Education, and took an active role in the educational process. The subjects in this study were raised to believe that education was important and valued, because this was emphasized at school and reinforced at home. That these 12 teachers chose a career in education is not surprising, since their first teachers were parents who believed in the American dream.

Family Environment

Eleven of the 12 teachers in this study have supportive spouses who respect their mate's commitment to the teaching profession. Three are married to teachers, and two of them credit their partners for providing honest feedback and sensitive understanding of work-related concerns. One man identified his wife, an elementary teacher, as his professional role model because she inspires him with her ideas and creative approaches to instruction. Eleven teachers say they are happily married and describe their spouses as positive helpmates. This contentment in the personal sphere enables effective middle level teachers to take professional frustrations in stride, which may have an impact on career longevity.

Early Recognition of Sense of Mission

Although several teachers in this study did not have a desire to become teachers until adulthood, most of them were aware of a sense of

mission in early childhood. One male related that the call to teach has been within him for as long as he can remember; a female believes the decision to become a teacher was made before she entered kindergarten. A male stated, "I was always a teacher. I began tutoring other students in sixth grade." Although all of the teachers have frustrations with various aspects of the profession--the majority of issues can be addressed through a restructuring of schools. Working closely with students is still the most satisfying part of their job, a fulfillment of the mission which has led them into education. Geoffery Chaucer said of the scholar in the General Prologue of "Canterbury Tales," "And gladly wolde he lerne and gladly teche" (Harrison, 1954, p.17). The effective middle level teachers in this study would agree.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary and Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to identify sustaining and impinging factors on teaching satisfaction of effective middle level teachers. Through career history interviews, data were obtained which revealed elements that these teachers perceived had contributed to their professional development and perspectives on teaching.

The 12 effective middle level teachers who participated in this study are more than masters of their craft; they are also distinguished by their humanity, which is the cornerstone of a strong sense of mission. Throughout the interviews the concept of caring for students emerges repeatedly in the data. When sharing memorable moments that touched their lives, nearly all of the teachers expressed strong sentiments. Pleasurable encounters were recalled with laughter and quiet pride. Despite the passage of time, failure to reach a student was for many a source of sadness. These teachers, who refer to students as "their kids," are more than instructional leaders in the classroom; they fulfill other social roles, as well. Whether the young adolescent seeks moral guidance, help in becoming a more successful student, or nurturing because there is no parent or significant other available to build self-esteem, the teachers in this study try to give students what they need.

Commitment to teaching, for these effective middle level teachers, is sustained in four ways. A strong sense of mission, relationships

with students, supportive administrators, and positive feedback/support system are contributing factors to teaching commitment.

Although all the teachers in this study have a strong sense of commitment to teaching, only eight are equally committed to the profession and expect to remain in teaching until they retire. Four teachers appear to be less committed to the profession. The three teachers who may take early retirement have close relationships with their students and perceive that they have become more effective with experience. If they leave teaching, it is because another option has become more desirable. Teachers who develop a sense of mission as adults may also be less committed to the profession than those who became cognizant of this mission to teach in childhood. Two of the three subjects who decided to become teachers during college or in adulthood may leave the profession prematurely. Chuck Swanson is considering early retirement, and Jim Nichols has nearly left the profession twice after only 15 years. Although he has regained his commitment, Jim admits he derives a sense of contentment by "taking one day at a time." The need for change could again resurface and drive him from the profession.

A supportive administrator is a crucial factor in perceived job satisfaction. While all 12 of the teachers note a positive relationship with their current principals, three do not respect them as instructional leaders. These three teachers cite poor staff morale resulting from lack of teacher empowerment in the decision-making

process. This negative school climate, cited by three teachers, is counteracted through the development of strong teacher support systems with colleagues. Tommy Chung said that, after working with a non-supportive principal for many years, the new administrator has increased his years of service to the district because of his positive attitude and appreciation of staff. Thus, even though administrators may be supportive of effective middle level teachers, unless these administrators are also strong instructional leaders who are willing to share leadership decisions with staff, job satisfaction may decrease.

The teachers in this study had a support system to provide feedback on personal and educational issues. The three who worked on teams cited close relationships with team members as critical components of job satisfaction. For Laura Ashley, supportive colleagues are able to dissipate the stress that results from a lack of leadership in her school.

Positive feedback is given to these teachers from students, parents, and other people in the school district. Some teachers have ongoing relationships with former students, who are now adults in the community. Others maintain a connection through correspondence and phone calls. All of the teachers perceive opportunities to interact with former students reinforcing to their sense of mission and enjoy remaining a part of their lives.

Three attitudinal qualities are noted in the data that characterize the teachers in this study. They perceive challenges and

change as opportunities for growth, they possess a positive attitude and high self-esteem, and they view teaching as a moral enterprise.

Effective middle level teachers thrive on challenges that nourish their growth. Change is embraced by these educators who continually seek opportunities to improve their expertise and become more adept at meeting student developmental needs. Nearly all of the sample express a fear of becoming stagnant and worn down by routine. They are invigorated by new knowledge that challenges old paradigms and fosters renewed discovery. For effectiveness to be sustained, teachers must have avenues for growth within the profession.

Whereas teachers in this study derive primary job satisfaction from their interactions with students, professional growth is the fuel that enables them to sustain their enthusiasm and commitment to teaching. The desire for positive change and challenge resurfaces repeatedly in the data. Greg Clark said, "If it would be an area of stimulation, of growth, of discovery," he would consider leaving the profession and referred to a need for growth 24 times during the interview sessions. Pat Berry, the National Health Teacher of the Year who took early retirement because she was "ready for a change," emphasized an eagerness to accept new challenges 23 times. Mary Lou Burch, the only teacher with a doctorate in education, stated 20 times that opportunities for personal and professional growth were of critical importance to her as a lifelong learner. Eight of the 12 teachers emphasized a need for change and challenge a minimum of 10 times. The lowest number of references made to growth was six. As an

average, the necessity of on-going opportunities for growth was noted 14 times. To ensure that distinguished teachers sustain a lifetime commitment to teaching, the profession must become more responsive to variables that affect the teacher/student relationship and opportunities for lifelong learning, two critical components of job satisfaction.

All of the teachers have a positive attitude about themselves as educational leaders in the classroom. They believe that their efforts make a difference to young adolescents, which is reaffirming to their sense of mission. These teachers are willing to work long hours and make personal sacrifices in order to provide students with meaningful learning experiences. That teaching is not "just a job" is evident. Many perceive it as a calling, a moral enterprise. Despite low salaries that cause some teachers to seek summer employment, all admit that money cannot buy happiness--that it is better to work in a profession that is rewarding than in one that pays more but is unfulfilling. Even though the 12 teachers in this study believe they would receive merit pay if it were an option in their school, 10 foresee that this practice could have a negative impact on teacher morale and staff cohesiveness. By looking beyond their own pocketbooks to larger educational issues, teaching is reaffirmed as a moral enterprise.

Six crucial factors emerge in the data that helped shape the careers of the teachers in this study. All 12 had a mentor or role model who inspired them to enter the profession. Most perceived

teachers as role models while still youngsters in grade school. A few noted poor teachers who modeled behaviors or characteristics that had a negative impact on student learning. The effective middle level teachers analyzed the mistakes of these educators to maximize opportunities for student success in their own classrooms.

The environment or area in which they lived shaped the careers of four teachers, two of whom left their countries to continue their education in America. Two others left negative environments where complacency and poverty took a toll on other family members. Both of these men came from large families of 8 and 10 children, respectively, and each one was the only individual to graduate from college of all the siblings. By leaving their childhood surroundings, the four teachers were able to achieve their childhood dream of becoming a teacher before negative influences impacted their life choices.

All of the teachers in this study came from intact families, where two parents remained married until death. In the majority of homes, education was stressed as important, and most of the teachers knew at an early age that they would be attending college after graduation from high school. That family values are transmitted from one generation to the next became apparent in this study. Of the 11 adult children of these effective middle level teachers, 10 earned college degrees, and 1 is still taking coursework in education. The younger children enjoy school, according to their parents, and are good students. Although 10 of the adult children have professional careers, only 1 chose to become a teacher. This appears to be a

decision based on two factors. Most of them wanted a better paying job and were less willing to give the time that it takes to be an effective teacher. Several of the teachers noted that their children observed them correcting papers, chaperoning school activities, and attending professional meetings in the evening or on weekends during their childhood and verbalized that they were unwilling to make such a personal sacrifice. Most of them chose careers in business where the monetary reward was greater and the work schedule was perceived as less rigorous.

Eleven of the teachers have a positive home environment and credit their spouse for support that sustains their commitment to teaching. One person, who was separated from his wife, believes the time he expended on his career took a toll on his marriage. Troy Johnson hopes to balance the priorities in his life so that he can have both a rewarding career and a happy marriage.

The three minority teachers are able to establish close connections with learners through their identification with student diversity. By drawing upon their own experiences and sharing them in the classroom, they may become role models for young adolescents who have obstacles that hinder learning in their own lives. Being able to establish rapport with students who are at risk of dropping out of school, such as Troy Johnson, Maria O'Riley, and Tommy Chung are able to do, is an asset that these minority teachers bring to the profession.

Pre-teaching experiences shaped the careers of three individuals. Two of them did not decide until adulthood to become teachers. A positive coaching experience during college influenced Chuck Swanson to abandon his plans for a career in business and become a teacher instead. Cindy Schafer discovered her gift for teaching while tutoring elementary students at her children's school, which led her to seek a degree in education. Paula Wood nearly left the profession after a traumatic student teaching experience, which caused her to accept a position outside of education for 4 years. Over 55 years of accumulated educational expertise would have been lost if circumstances had not intervened and brought these effective middle level teachers into the profession that they have served with such distinction.

Whereas many unique factors influence personal attitudes and shape career histories over time, four commonalities emerged from the profiles of the effective middle level teachers in this study. All had mentors or role models who inspired them to enter the profession or enhance their expertise. Nearly all of the subjects grew up in positive, supportive families where education was revered and nurtured by parents who believed in the American dream. Marriage to an understanding spouse ensures that these teachers have a safe haven in which to escape the daily stress which often accompanies a service profession. Reflective thinking characteristic of these teachers renourishes their sense of mission and importance in the educational process.

One variable emerged from the data that enables these masterful artists to sustain their commitment to teaching: on-going, personal and professional growth, facilitated by change and challenge. Teachers who are provided opportunities to extend their horizons through diverse avenues remain enthusiastic, energized, and eager to help students learn.

Recommendations

This study investigated sustaining and impinging factors that affect teaching satisfaction of effective middle level teachers. Based on the Review of the Literature and the data collected through career history interviews, the researcher made the following recommendations:

1. Schools should utilize a team concept to reduce the isolation that often affects both students and teachers in larger educational settings. Several of the teachers in this study who worked on teams noted the strong support system that was available to them through working closely with colleagues. These teachers believed that assigning students to teams ensured that they would develop a sense of belonging, which is so important to young adolescents. The team concept can be particularly beneficial for reducing racial conflict, as Maria O'Riley noted in her inner-city school. By providing students opportunity to work with peers from different cultures and ethnic backgrounds, friendships may develop across racial lines which could facilitate respect and appreciation for human diversity.

2. For licensure renewal credits, school districts should make community service projects an option. These projects would benefit both the school district and the community and could be implemented in cooperation with Community Education. Tutoring adults or organizing programs which would increase parental involvement in the school would be avenues through which teachers could grow professionally. For schools with a high racial diversity, attempts to strengthen the bond between home and school could have innumerable benefits for all participants in the educational process, as both Troy Johnson and Maria O'Riley discovered.

3. Administrators should solicit mentors for new teachers from experienced staff and provide training that would enhance this relationship. Mentor teachers should receive compensation time or a modified teaching schedule to allow time for conferencing and classroom observation. For several teachers in this study, a mentor or supportive colleague during the critical early years of teaching made a difference in their job satisfaction and possible career longevity.

4. More flexibility in teacher contracts should be utilized. Job sharing would provide freedom to write, travel, and pursue personal and professional goals for those so inclined. Two older teachers in this study who are contemplating early retirement might have given serious consideration to such an option, were it available, rather than leave the profession that they enjoy. The teacher who resigned because she didn't want to work 10 hours a day any longer and wanted a

"change" would have had an opportunity to meet her own personal needs had such contract flexibility been provided.

A Teacher Exchange Program should be established with other schools so that teachers can collaborate with educators in their areas of expertise. Pat Jones, who had numerous opportunities to interact with state officials and teachers throughout the school district in her role as educational consultant, noted how much she learned from others in her field. Although most classroom teachers do not have this flexibility built into their schedules, an exchange program would offer them new avenues for professional growth. Since there is a limited amount of money for staff development in many school districts, this exchange would be cost effective as well as stimulating for those who seek opportunities to broaden their sphere of expertise.

5. Rotation of staff should be an option for those interested who have the certification to teach in another building in the district. For Chuck Swanson the transfer to another school setting after 32 years is "refreshing" and a challenge which he finds energizing. This change may effect his career longevity and could make a positive difference to other teachers who become bored with the sameness of routine and environment over a period of time.

6. Schools with student populations high in cultural diversity should provide staff development programs that address minority and gender issues. Maria O'Riley, who teaches in an inner-city school, perceives that she would be more effective with specialized training.

Troy Johnson, who teaches in a school with a 43% minority population, expressed dismay at the lack of knowledge colleagues have about cultural backgrounds that differ from their own. Staff development programs that provide practical, timely information critical to maximizing student success will enable teachers to sustain job satisfaction through more effective teaching.

7. Nearly all of the effective middle level teachers in this study felt the education classes taken in college did little to prepare them for the realities of teaching. Although theory was perceived as important in the development of a knowledge base, it was, these teachers believe, overemphasized to the exclusion of other experiences that would have been more beneficial to them as beginning teachers. Eleven cited student teaching as the most valuable component of their teacher preparation program.

To better prepare teachers for the complexities of the present day classroom, Colleges of Education should provide more experiences for preservice teachers to interact with students. By extending the student teaching field experience, preservice teachers may become more cognizant of student needs and problems that emerge over a longer period of time. Training should be given in conflict resolution to enable teachers to feel confident of their classroom management skills. A component should be added to teacher education curriculum on stress management to ensure that new teachers are armed with information and techniques for channeling stress that could prevent burnout or an early exodus from the teaching profession.

All preservice teachers should receive information on various learning styles and diverse instructional strategies that best meet these learner preferences. Training in minority issues that hinder student success will enable beginning teachers to feel more confident about their role as instructional leaders, particularly in schools with a high cultural diversity.

Colleges of Education must select with extreme care the schools and supervising teachers to work with student teachers. Paula Wood removed herself from teaching for 7 years because of a negative student teaching experience in an inner-city school. Although she chose this locale because of her interest in working with minority students, lack of administrative support and a complacent supervising teacher nearly caused Paula to abandon the profession forever. With the call for accountability in education greater today than ever before, the teaching profession can ill-afford to lose capable, caring teachers. Colleges of Education must place preservice teachers with master teachers in a positive environment so that a mentorship might develop which will increase the probability of a successful student teaching experience and satisfying career.

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APPENDIX

INTERVIEW GUIDE

INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. How do you remain committed to teaching?
2. What events have been crucial in shaping your career?
3. In what ways are you different from other teachers who have left the profession or who have burned out?
4. What are your strengths as a middle level teacher?
5. Why did you become a teacher?
6. What conditions of work are stressful for you?
7. How likely is it that you will be a teacher in ten years?
8. Can you compare the kids you taught in the beginning of your career with the ones you teach now?
9. How do you think society views teachers?
10. What would you say are the three biggest issues facing education today?
11. What do you remember most about teaching?
12. How useful was your teaching preparation?
13. How would you describe your administrator?
14. What makes a good middle school?
15. How has society changed since you first began teaching?
16. If you were starting over again, would you still become a teacher?
17. What would make you leave teaching?
18. Do personal problems ever affect your teaching?
19. How do parents perceive you?
20. What is most rewarding about teaching?
21. What kind of professional tasks do you prefer?
22. What kind of relationships do you have with colleagues?

23. Where do you receive most of your professional and intellectual stimulation?
24. How do you deal with student diversity in your class?
25. What advice would you give a new teacher?